DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 432 685 CE 079 040

AUTHOR Osman, Ali
TITLE The "Strangers" among Us. The Social Construction of Identity in Adult Education. Linkoping Studies in Education and Psychology No. 61.
INSTITUTION Linkoping Univ. (Sweden). Dept. of Education and Psychology.
ISBN ISBN-91-7219-530-4
ISSN ISSN-1102-7517
PUB DATE 1999-00-00
NOTE 232p.
AVAILABLE FROM Department of Education and Psychology, Linkoping University, SE-581 83, Linkoping, Sweden.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research (143)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC10 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Adult Education; Adult Educators; Adult Students; Community Education; Comparative Analysis; *Cultural Differences; Ethnography; Folk Schools; Foreign Countries; *Immigrants; *Indigenous Populations; Interpersonal Relationship; Labeling (of Persons); *Multicultural Education; Self Concept; Student Attitudes; Teacher Attitudes
IDENTIFIERS Folk High Schools; *Identity (Psychological); Social Constructivism; *Sweden

ABSTRACT

A study examined the labeling practices in the multicultural discourse in two adult education settings in Sweden: a day folk high school and a municipal adult education center. A total of 33 students and 9 staff members from two adult education programs were interviewed. The labeling processes used by the "actors" (the adult learners and educators) were analyzed from the perspective of the theory of social constructionism. The native actors used the concepts of culture, ethnicity, and immigrants interchangeably to construct the nonnative actors as outsiders. However, the main concept used by the native actors to construct the nonnative actors as outsiders was culture. The talk of the native actors manifested strong affirmation of cultural difference. In the natives' talk, the nonEuropean/nonWestern cultures were conceptualized as the problem. "Racialization" of the concept of culture was another important aspect of the native actors' cultural discourse. The nonnatives defined themselves as outsiders and victims of the native actors' prejudices, and they viewed images of their culture as not only different but also inferior and a threat. Despite the fact that they shared many things in common, the native and nonnative actors talked as if they occupied a fixed identity or position. (Contains 87 references.) (MN)

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The Social Construction of Identity in Adult Education

Ali Osman

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Linköping University, Department of Education and Psychology

Linköping 1999

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Department of Education and Psychology
Linköping University
SE-581 83 Linköping, Sweden

ISRN-LiU-IPP-STU--61--SE
ISBN 91-7219-530-4
ISSN 1102-7517

Printed in Sweden by Parajett AB, Landskrona 1999

Contents

Acknowledgements

Chapter 1
Introduction and the aim of the study 9
Cultural diversity 10
Hybridity and the multicultural debate 15
Cosmopolitanism and multiculturalism 19
Multicultural education 21
The anti-racist perspective 23
The multicultural discourse in Sweden 25
The aim of the study 28

Chapter 2
The theoretical perspective of the study 30
Typing and constructionism 30
Social constructionism 31
Language 32
Discourse and Identity 33
Culture 35
Ethnicity 37
Race 39
Institutions 42
Biological and Cultural Racism 44
Individual, interpersonal, and institutional dimensions of racism 46
Power and Reality 48
Theoretical implications and structure of the study 49

Chapter 3
The ethnographic approach 53
Introduction. What do ethnographers do? 53
Entry in the field 56
Field relations with the participants 58
The recording of the data 61
The interviews 63
The interpretation of the material 65
Ethical considerations 69
The issue of validity 69
Reflexivity 72

Chapter 4
The context of the study: Introduction: a general description of adult education in Sweden 76
The folk high school 76
Municipal adult education 78
The research setting 79
The day folk high school 79
The educational programmes 83
The students in the folk high school 84
Komvux 85
The educational programmes 88
The students 90
The classrooms: Komvux and the folk high school 90

Chapter 5
The social practices of labelling 92
The Labels: "Immigrants" and "Swedes" 93
The labels "ethnicity and culture" 95
Institutional labelling of the actors 98
The initial encounter: the pattern of interpersonal relations 101
The folk high school: the pattern of non-interaction 101
The municipal adult education: the pattern of non-interaction 105
The views of teachers 106
The perspective of the students 108
The group conflict 110
Discussion 115
Summary 118
Reflections 119

Chapter 6
The "other" as a problem 121
The Teachers: the "other" as a "cultural" difference and a problem 122
The students 127
The "native" students: the "other" as culturally different and a problem 130
Difference are attitudes/experiences 132
Language differences as a problem 136
Summary and discussion 138

Chapter 7
Student portraits **142**
The adult students and their baggage 142
John 143
What is Komvux for John? 144
John and school life 145
John and the "other" 147
Interpretation: The municipal adult education and John 148
Alex 148
What is Komvux for Alex? 149
Alex: The school life in Komvux 150
The multicultural "other" 153
Interpretation, the immigrant and Komvux 154
Laila 156
What is Komvux for Laila? 157
Laila and the school life in Komvux 159
Laila and "others" 160
Interpretation: Laila, the single mother and Komvux 161
Zlata 162
What is Komvux for Zlata? 162
Zlata and the school life 163
Zlata and the "natives" 165
Interpretation: Zlata, immigrant, and Komvux 166
Nina 168
What is the school for Nina? 168
Nina and the school life 169
Nina and "other" 171
Interpretation: Nina and the folk high school 173
Anette 173
What is the folk high school for Anette? 174
Anette and the school life in the folk high school 175
Anette and "other" 177
Interpretation: Anette, single mother, and the folk high school 178
Per 179
What is the school for Per? 179
Per and the school life 180
Per and the "other" 182
Interpretation: single, middle-aged, and the folk high school 183
Claudia 184

What is the schol life for Claudia? 184
Claudia: the school life in Komvux 185
Claudia and the natives 187
Interpretation: Claudia, single mother, middle-aged, immigrant and Komvux 188
Summary and discussion 189
Reflections 192

Chapter 8
Conclusions and Discussion **195**
The researcher as the "other" 195
Discussion 197
Difference as identity 198
Difference as experience 203
Difference as a subjective position 205
The "natives" as the prejudiced "other" 207
Language as a problem 213
Educational and pedagogic implications 217

References **223**

Acknowledgements

The last 6 years have been a culmination of a long journey. A journey that took me to a number of different countries, and in each of these different countries I have been inspired by different people from different parts of the world. In my past I would like to thank my friends Osman Ismail and Abdi Adan without their influence I doubt if I would have completed this journey.

In the last four years I had the pleasure of working with professor Staffan Larsson who guided me through the torturous and often frustrating process of writing a doctorate thesis. But many times he went beyond his role as my academic adviser. He was always there and listened, giving constructive criticism, and advise that kept me focused during the tough times. I would also like to thank Mats Ekholm and Eric Olsson for their valuable critic and comments that have considerably improved this work.

At the department of education and psychology, Linköping university I had the delight of working with the adult education research group. A group that functioned as a sounding board for my half baked ideas at the beginning of my research process. I would like to particularly thank Bernt Gustavsson, Lisbeth Eriksson, and Sam Paldanius, without their constructive criticism, support and patience this work would have taken a long time to complete. Thanks also to Martin Lundberg, Malin Helgesson, and Maritta Edman for her patience in preparing the study for printing. I am indebted to Maryan Abdi Hussein and my son Keisa Ali Osman and the sacrifice they made in order for me to complete my studies.

Chapter 1

Introduction and the aim of the study

The educational system in any society (as a phenomenon) is one of the few institutions in a society that incorporates all its member irrespective of culture, race, ethnicity or class. But it is because of this very diversity and the social function of schools that the system is at the centre of controversy and debate about multiculturalism in many Western European countries. Amy Gutman summarised the crux of this debate (in the United States) in the following manner:

> Yet it is hard to find a democratic or democratizing society these days that is not a site of some significant controversy over whether and how its public institutions should better recognize the identities of cultural and disadvantaged minorities. What does it mean for citizens with different cultural identities, often based on ethnicity, race, gender or religion, to recognize ourselves as equals in the way our children are educated in public schools? (1994, p. 3)

The intention of this study is to describe and analyse the manner in which groups are labelled and othered in the multicultural social discourse in Sweden. The focus, hence, is on a specific talk about a social phenomenon, i.e. the multiculturality of the Swedish society and the labelling practices in this context.

My focus in this study is not to resolve the contradictions inherent in the talk itself or attempt to come up with solutions or models to resolve this problem. My ambition is to show the complexity of the multicultural social situation in talk and action. Moreover, the talk and labelling practices may have consequences. I intend to discuss that aspect too.

In this introductory chapter, I will briefly attempt to delineate the different positions in the multicultural discourses among researchers and intellectuals, using the international debate as the point of departure. However, whenever possible, I will attempt to include debates in this area from Sweden. It is important, however, to emphasise that the debate in this area is still relatively new in Sweden and Scandinavia

Cultural diversity

Cultural diversity is a term generally used to signify the presence of different groups of people with different races, systems of belief (religion), languages, etc. in a geographical area. Consequently a variety of cultural diversity models has been devised based on explicit and implicit ideological suppositions. These models attempt to come up with a delineation of pluralism according to the following main descriptors: race, religion, gender, and language (Lynch et al., 1992).

Multiculturalism is one such ideology or model. But according to Fiskin (1995), the term is understood in different ways by different people. For example, for a long time, the United States was described as "God's melting pot". According to Parillo (1996), Michel Guillaume de Crèvecouer was the first to describe and popularise the idea of America as a melting pot in 1782.

> What is an American? He is either a European, or the descendant of a European; hence that strange mixture of blood which you will find in no other country. I could point out to you a man whose grandfather was an Englishman, whose wife was Dutch, whose son married a French woman, and whose present four sons now have four wives of different nations ... Here individuals of all nations are melted into a new race of men, whose labours and posterity will one day cause great changes in the world (ibid., p. 9).

The concept of the USA as a melting pot he points out that was later taken up by authors such as Ralph Waldo Emerson in 1845, and Israel Zagwill in his play called *"The Melting Pot"* in 1908.

> American is God's Crucible, the Great melting pot. A pot where all the races of Europe are melting and reforming! ... Germans and Frenchmen, Irishmen and English, Jews and Russians, into the crucible with you all! God is making the American! ... the real American has not yet arrived ... He will be a fusion of all races, perhaps the coming superman (ibid., p. 12).

In the above understanding of the "melting pot", America is viewed as "White". Native Americans, Mexican Americans, and African Americans were not regarded as part of this melting pot. This fact is essential in order to understand the present debate and perspectives on multiculturalism in the United States. The point of contention vis-à-vis multiculturalism in the United States is about the marginalisation of women and people of colour in the United States,

and the roles (historical, and in present) they played in the social and cultural development of the United States.

In the 50s, 60s, and the 70s social movements, particularly the civil rights movements and the feminist movements, women and people of colour began to demand recognition and their rightful position in the American life, past and present (Fiskin, 1995). The movement demanding the inclusion of the marginalised voices in the educational curriculum in Great Britain, the United States and Canada came to be commonly known as "multiculturalism". Multiculturalism as expressed and used in the educational contexts is founded on the assumption that the major issue or problems confronting the educational systems is how to include the perspectives, contributions and experiences of minorities in the cultural and economic developments of these countries, and the Western societies in general, or as Ratansi writes:

> The basic education prescription is the sympathetic teaching of "other cultures" in order to dispel the ignorance which is seen to be the root of prejudice and intolerance. The overall social and political projects is the creation of a harmonious democratic cultural pluralism, a healthy "cultural diversity" (1992, p. 25).

In multicultural or polyethnic societies the central issues and point of contention and conflicts involve what Taylor (1994) in his famous essay calls the recognition or non-recognition of cultures of different collectivities in a multicultural society. In this essay, he traces the development of modern identity. He notes:

> The thesis is that our identity is partly shaped by recognition or its absence, often by the misrecognition of others, and so a person or a group of people can suffer real damage, real distortion, if the people or society around them mirror back to them a confining or demeaning or contemptible picture of themselves. Nonrecognition or misrecognition can inflict harm , can be a form of oppression, imprisoning someone in a false or distorted and reduced mode of being (ibid., p. 25).

For both Taylor and Habermas their perspective on autonomy, respect and recognition, is based on Mead's conceptualisation of autonomy as a process of socialisation. That is, individuals are dependent on the generalised "others" (intersubjective knowledge of the "other" in this case) to create their identity. That is not to say that there are no differences between the two. Taylor in his essay does not deal with the relationship between the individual and the

collective, while Habermas questions the equality of culture without a priori communication about values in polyethnic or multicultural societies. Appiah also questions the relationship between the individual and the collective, stressing that recognition and worth are and should be viewed as two different issues (Thorseth, 1999).

In the final analysis both Taylor and Habermas are comfortable with a non-problematic assumption of culture in multicultural societies. The main difference between the two is that Taylor argues for respect and public acknowledgement of "cultures" as a starting point, while Habermas argues for an a priori communication between cultures in multiethnic or polyethnic societies. For a detailed discussions of this complex problem see *Multiculturalism* edited by Amy Gutman (1994) and May Thorseth's (1999) dissertation.

Taylor proposes a model in which he argues that under certain conditions basic rights have to be limited in order to promote or guarantee the survival of a particular culture. The issue or contradiction apparent in Taylor's model (and in the multicultural discourse) can be reduced to the contradiction and conflict between the individual and the society or the collective rights of cultural "others" in relation to the individual in a multicultural society. Taylor opts for a violation of individual rights under certain circumstances for the good of the society in general. Habermas (1994), on the other hand, argues that it is possible to protect both collective rights and individual rights if one uses the concepts of the good and the just drawn from moral theory.

> Once we take this internal connection between democracy and the constitutional state seriously, it becomes clear that the system of rights is blind neither to unequal social conditions nor to cultural differences. The colour blindness of the selective reading vanishes once we assume that we ascribe to the bearers of individual rights an identity that is conceived intersubjectively. Persons and legal persons as well, become individualised only through a process of socialization. A correctly understood theory of rights requires a politics of recognition that protects the integrity of the individual in the life context in which his or her identity is formed (ibid., p. 113).

My thinking around collective identity is in line with Appiah's insofar as the collective identity is taken for granted and not problematised in the multicultural discourse.

> The politics of recognition requires that one's skin colour, one's sexual body, should be acknowledged politically in ways that make it hard for those who want to treat their skin and sexual

> body as a personal dimension of the self. And personal does not mean secret, but not too tightly scripted. I think (and Taylor, I gather, does not) that the desire of Quebecois to require people who are "ethnically" francophone to teach their children in French steps over the boundary. I believe (to pronounce on a topic Taylor does not address) that this is, in some sense, the same boundary that is crossed by someone who demands that I organize my life around my "race" or my "sexuality"... But it is equally important to bear in mind that a politics of identity can be counted on to transform the identities on whose behalf it ostensibly labors. Between the politics of recognition and the politics of compulsion, there is no bright line (1994, p. 163).

I do not advocate the total rejection of the collective identity, as long as the socially constructed collective identity(ies) does not impinge on individuals rights, worth and dignity or what I call in this study the multicultural discourse in practice, and I do not think Appiah in the above quotation does that, if I read him right.

According to Fiskin (1995), the critics of multiculturalism, particularly in the United States, fear that the multiculturalist rejection of a common American culture, reflected in the melting pot ideology, can lead to tribalism, conflict and the disintegration of the United States as a nation. In contrast, Canada, according to Moodley (1995), defines itself as a cultural mosaic, and celebrates its multiethnic diversity composed of two founding nations: English and French, a large immigrant population and the first nation. Although multiculturalism in Canada has little substance, Moodley stresses that it gives respectability to difference and recognises minority leaders as partners of the government . Hence, the social discourse in Canada does not view the "other" as a problem. In this regard, Moodley notes that there is no difference between the United States and Canadian multicultural discourse. In their rhetorics, both celebrate cultural differences or diversity.

But despite the above similarities, the multicultural discourse and debate in the United States, Great Britain and Canada differ on one important aspect and that is on the issue of national identity, or as Fiskin writes:

> The stories we tell about the past matter a great deal. And not just in the academy. What is at stake is not simply college syllabi, but our vision of what we are as a people and as a nation. It is not simply our version of the past that is under siege, but our vision of the future (1995, p. 3).

Although immigrants are not viewed as a problem in the American discourse or as a threat to the unity of the nation; they are, however, expected to assimilate or shed their identity and ethnicity in favour of Western, preferably Anglo-Saxon, traditions and values. On the other hand, according to Moodley (1995), because Canada lacks a common state sanctioned identity, no group can: "exercise the same arrogant conformity pressures against perceived 'foreigners' as we find in Europe." She adds:

> As long as Europeanness is defined by ancestry, christianity and "whiteness", how can different newcomers ever feel at home even if they were to acquire citizenship? (ibid., p. 23).

In his analysis of the multicultural discourse in Europe and in Great Britain in particular, Ratansi (1992) emphasises the point made by Moodley and argues that in order to understand "race" and racism in Europe today one has to critically analyse the concept "culture" and its use in this discourse. Particularly, as Moodley argues, the "normal" culture in Europe is implicitly defined in terms of whiteness, ancestry, and christianity.

The ideas of "culture" and "identity" are central issues in the multicultural discourse and debate. For example, in her analysis of the multicultural debate, Haack (1995) identified four different perspectives: a) Social multiculturalism, this strand of multiculturalism refers to the idea that in a geographical area there are people with different cultural backgrounds that live together. The problem(s) that arise in such a context include the rejection of minority "culture" by the dominant "culture". In other words, the dominant "culture" co-opts the cultures of minority groups in culturally diverse societies, hence the discourse in such societies attempts to argue in favour of preserving the cultures and languages of minority groups in such societies. b) Pluralistic educational multiculturalism simply refers to the idea that it is good for the dominant culture(s) to learn about the culture(s) of the immigrant communities or minority groups. c) Particularistic educational multiculturalism is a perspective within the multicultural movement that advocates the idea that it is essential for minority students to be exclusively educated in their cultures. Finally, d), philosophical multiculturalism, according to Haack, "refers to the idea that the dominant culture is not and should not be privileged" (ibid., p. 397). The focus on "culture" in the multicultural discourse, particularly in Great Britain, gave birth in the late 70s and 80s to a new variant or model of multiculturalism – the "anti- racist" perspective or movement.

Hybridity and the multicultural debate

Hybridity is a concept that is increasingly being used in the multicultural discourse. In this brief presentation, I will not attempt to map the theory of hybridity, but I will highlight certain aspects of the ideas as a critic or a third space in relation to the multiculturalist and anti-racist perspectives in this debate. Even in this limited context, it would not be possible to exhaust the varieties of positions within this thinking and their implications in the multiultural discourse. Hybridity, as a discourse according to Young has been around since the 19th century. He writes:

> In the nineteenth century and in the late twentieth, hybridity was a key issue for cultural debate. The reason differ, but are not altogether dissimilar. The question had first been broached in the eighteenth century when the different varieties of human beings had been classed as part of the animal kingdom according to the hierarchical scale of the Great Chain of Being (1996, p. 6).

The idea has been revitalised and given a new meaning in the current multicultural discourse in Great Britain, and the United States. The rehabilitation of the concept as a third position in the multicultural debate is explicit in the hybridity discourse. Despite its dubious connection to 19th century supremacist ideology, the concept in this discussion emphasises its potential for inclusivity (Papastergiadis, 1997).

The dominant paradigm, according to Young (1996), in the 18th century was that human beings belonged to a distinct species and order or hierarchy. This scientific view, according to him, clashed with the religious belief that all human being pertain to one family. It also conflicted with the anti-slavery movements which took a similar position as the religious or the biblical version of human origin.

The issue of human origin was settled a long time ago. According to Young, the consensus was that humans belong to the same species. The initial construction of the term referred to the offsprings of different human species, but, as Young points out this concept has lost its original meaning if we assume that human being originate from a single species, and the different "races" are but subgroups of the same species.

He identifies a number of positions in hybridity as a discourse in the past: a) the polygenist perspective rejects the idea that people from different "races" can mix, and if they do their offspring after a generation or two become infertile. b) The decomposition argument

assumes that human beings can to a certain degree mix but claims that their offspring either die out after sometime or as Young puts it: "It reverts to one of the permanent parent types." c) The amalgamation position is similar to the idea of the melting pot. This is founded on the assumption that human beings can procreate, and it would not affect the ability of their offsprings to multiply. The product of their union produces a new "race" with distinct physical features and morality. (d) The contradictory amalgamation thesis on the other hand claims: "... that miscegenation produces a mongrel group that makes up a raceles chaos' merely a corruption of the originals, degenerate, degraded, threatening the vigour and virtue of the pure 'race' with which they come in contact with" (ibid., p. 18). (e) Finally, the idea that the product of "close" species is fertile, while that of distant species is either infertile or declines after a certain period of time.

Similarly, according to Hollinger (1995), the idea of melting pot was advocated as early as the revolutionary era in the United States. One can, therefore, argue that the mainstream "American" is a hybrid, a product of a variety of "cultures" although dominantly European. Young stresses that:

> If hybridity has become the issue once more, we may note that it has been, and can be invoked, to imply contrafusion, and disjunction (or even separate development) as well as fusion and assimilation (1995, p. 18).

In addition, he also notes that the variety of positions within this discourse can be both a problem and the strength of hybridity as a concept or idea. The concept can be used in the multicultural discourse to advocate or justify a number of positions that are contradictory. The revolutionary aspect of hybridity, however, endorses the idea that identity, "is not the combination, accumulation, fusion or synthesis of various component but an energy field of different forces" (Papastergiadis, 1996, p. 258). Its usefulness lies in opening a third space of encounter, especially where identity is said to be founded on a particular boundary of exclusivity between the "Us" and "Them". In addition, if the boundary is constructed or defined as positive, then Papastergiadis writes: "... the hybrid may yield strength and vitality ... the convential value of the hybrid is always positioned in relation to the value of purity, along axes of inclusion and exclusion. In some circumstances, the 'curse' of hybridity is seen as a mixed blessing" (ibid., p. 259). This is apparent in the discussion, or discourse, about "blackness" or who is "black" or "white" in the politics of difference, identity and anti-racism in the

United States and Great Britain. It is also a major issue in the demographic representation of the diverse nature or characteristics of the United States and Great Britain.

For example, in Great Britain the term "black" refers to people of African-Caribbean origin, and South East Asians. This categorisation, according to Brah (1992), has led to heated discussions. Afro-Carribeans, and South East Asians, according to Brah, migrated to England at about the same time. Both groups were generally employed as semi-skilled or unskilled labourers and as a consequence they found themselves in the lowest structures of the British society. Although the manner in which they were racialised and stereotyped was different, the common denominator was their "non-whiteness" and the racism they were subjected to. In addition, they were generally typed in the social discourse as "coloureds". This label according to Brah is not simply a descriptive typification, but indicates a relation of domination and subordination. Brah further argues that the term has been reproduced and reconstituted through political, cultural and economic processes in post colonial Britain.

In addition, according to Brah the term was adopted by both Asian and Africa-Caribbean activists in the 60s and the 70s in a project to rectify the condition of "blacks" in Great Britain. But increasingly, the concept is under attack. The critics point out that the term "black" as used in the black power ideology embodies the experiences of sub-Saharan Africans and has no similar cultural meaning for South East Asian. The term can only be used in a political sense in relation to South East Asians. In addition, many South East Asians do not regard themselves as African, nor do many African Caribbeans accept them as such. But at the same time Brah points out that many South East Asians regard themselves as black when they talk of racism in Great Britain. Another point of contention in the use of the term according to Brah is that: "It is argued that the term serves to conceal the cultural needs of groups other than those of African-Caribbean origins" (ibid., p. 129). This contention she points out is grounded in "ethnicism". Ethnicism views the experiences of the racialised other in terms of "culture" independent of social experience related to, for example, class, gender, racism, or sexuality.

> This means that a group identified as culturally different is assumed to be internally homogeneous, when this is patently not the case ... In other words ethnicist discourse seek to impose stereotypic notions of "common cultural needs" upon a

> heterogeneous groups with diverse social aspirations and interests (ibid., p. 129).

The view of culture as a bounded whole, including and excluding social groups, in a multiethnic social situation is explicit in the ethnicism. It assumes that there is a cultural essence that a group shares that should be maintained, passed on from generation to generation, and protected from the dilution by an inferior "culture". Hybridity as a cultural phenomenon is apparent, for example, in music, and arts, but also in the creolisation of language, such as Rinkeby Swedish, a hybrid language composed of a variety of immigrant languages and Swedish.

In this brief presentation, I have avoided examining the complex account of the current discourse of hybridity, cultural or racial, but focused instead on the implication of hybridity for the multicultural discourse. In this regard hybridity as a third space threatens or problematises the multicultural ideology, which forces individuals to reify and locate their identity(ies) in a particular ethno-racial groups in the politics of identity and difference. The basic problem with hybridity is that, it seems to deny the collective experience with its focus on the individual experience. Consequently its usefulness in dealing with the marginalisation of minorities is limited, as John Hutnyk argues:

> Hybridity-talk is certainly useful in bringing to attention the ways in which cultural constructions can maintain exclusions ... My charge against hybridity is thus that it is a rhetorical cul-de-sac which trivialises Black political activity (organisational achievement, history and so on) in the UK over the past twenty five years, diverting attention from the urgency of antiracist politics in favour of middle class conservative success stories in the Thatcher-with-a-bindi-spot mould. What this means is that rather than continue to fight for solidarity among anti-racist, anti-imperialists, building upon the histories of those struggles of the 70s and 80s, the fashion for hybridity theory takes centre stage. Theorising hybridity becomes, in some cases, an excuse for ignoring sharp organisational questions, enabling a passive and comfortable-if linguistically sophisticated-intellectual quietism (1997, p. 122).

From this brief description the concept and its use is not far from controversy, and it is important to point out that, there are a number of positions or perspectives in the hybridity discourse which I have not delineated or developed in this text.

Cosmopolitanism and multiculturalism

Cosmopolitanism and universalism, according to Hollinger (1995), mean the same thing, inasmuch as they look beyond provinciality or a nation to a realm of mankind. However, he points out that there is a difference between the two projects. A universalist perspective focuses on what is common, while cosmopolitanism actively engages human diversity. In addition he notes that:

> Cosmopolitanism shares with all varieties of universalism a profound suspicion of enclosure, but cosmopolitanism is defined by another element not essential to universalism itself: recognition, acceptance, and eager exploration of diversity. Cosmopolitanism urges each individual and collective unit to absorb as much varied experience as it can, while retaining its capacity to advance its aims effectively. For cosmopolitan, the diversity of mankind is a fact; for a universalist, it is a problem (ibid., p. 84).

The contemporary cosmopolitan discourse, according to Friedman (1997) is, however, a new species, a new form of cosmopolitanism. In the past, a cosmopolitan was a modernist, one who was aware and understood human diversity, but was a rationalist and universalist. His identity, he writes, "was defined in terms of the abstract, the rights of man, not of cultures; science, not of wisdom, and rationality without metaphysics" (ibid., p. 74). On the other hand, he argues that today's cosmopolitans are, "cosmopolitans without modernism. They might be called post-modernist in the sense that they identify themselves as encompassing the world's variety and its subsequent mixture" (ibid., p. 74).

Hollinger (1995) further notes that there are a number of fundamental differences between the multicultural doctrine and cosmopolitanism. Multiculturalism tightly scripts "cultural" and "ethnical" boundaries and is interested in maintaining specific cultures, whereas cosmopolitanism has no allegiance to a particular culture. Finally, cosmopolitanism emphasises and understands that an individual can be a member of different communities simultaneously, while a multiculturalist, he writes, "is more oriented to the group, and is likely to identify each individual with reference to a single, primary community" (ibid., p. 85).

What is explicit in the above differences between cosmopolitanism and multiculturalist doctrine is not only a critic of multiculturalism, and politics of identity and difference, but also a third discourse about cultural relations, identity and difference. The cosmopolitanist perspective advocates a voluntary affiliation and an

allegiance to a variety of "cultures". A good example of voluntary participation is the ability of young men and women to participate in a variety of "cultures". They can be Swedes, middle class, a skate boarder, a hip-hop or Buddhist, living and acting out the "cultures" of their preferred "subcultures", without impacting negatively on their sense of belonging to a particular ethno-racial category or "culture", or without polluting the "culture(s)" they choose to act on. In brief, they are engaging in human diversity actively interrogating every culture or as Hollinger puts it, they engage in other cultures, "through sympathetic scrutiny" (ibid., p. 85).

Multicultural discourse, as noted earlier, assumes that the non-recognition of the culture of the other groups is not just a lack of respect, but it burdens the misrecognised group, often a person of colour with the sense of inferiority and self-hatred (Taylor, 1994). Hence, in the multicultural discourse, the ethno-racial identity is given more weight than the individual identity. An important aspect of this study, is therefore an attempt to contest this position or the multicultural position which emphasises cultural difference, or the primary identities. But also it is a critique of the exotization of motherland cultures as is in the case of some segment of communities in diaspora, for instance, the Rastafarian movement or other similar projects

I am aware my position can be criticised (as I also pointed out in the hybridity discourse) for shifting the burden on to the marginalised individual, ignoring in the process, not only the experiences, and history of minorities in pluralistic societies such as the U.K. and the United States, but also the material well-being of the marginalised minorities in these societies. Hence, defining it as a bourgeois project and a scramble by the "other" to differentiate and distance themselves from being typified and associated with their primary ethno-racial category.

The importance of the hybridity and cosmopolitan discourse is its rejection of the essentialisation of the "other", and the normative use of ethno-racial identities. According to Werbner (1997) one of the major achievements of post structuralism is its rejection of the notion of fixity and purity of primary ethno-racial identities. As a process, the concept has been freed from a loaded discourse of racial impurity and replaced with the idea of cultural creativity.

The multicultural discourse with its focus on "culture" has led to the development of educational models (multicultural education and anti-racist education) whose intentions are to include the voices and experiences of the minority groups in the school curriculum. Although these models differ fundamentally in their analysis they

attempt to prescribe solutions in the field of education to deal with issues and problems of a multicultural school and society.

Multicultural education

What is multicultural education? In answering this question, I will briefly focus on the definition, scope, praxis and on the major critique of this educational model for culturally diverse schools and society. This brief presentation of the concept and praxis is not and should not be viewed as, an exhaustive expose, but a short and a concise introduction to the underlying assumptions, praxis and limitations of multicultural education.

One of the major problems with this concept is the variety of terminologies that are interchangeable used, for example, "intercultural education", "inter-ethnic education", "transcultural education", "crosscultural education" etc. Lundberg (1991) and Ekstrand (1985), reviewing the literature in the area, concluded that the terms are often used synonymously. Hence, in this study multicultural education and intercultural education denote or mean the same thing.

Despite the variety of the terminologies and definitions, Banks (1992) emphasises that there is a general consensus among researchers in this area on the aims of multicultural education namely:

> To reform schools and other educational institutions to enable students from diverse ethnic and social classes to experience educational success and social mobility. To give both male and female students an equal chance to experience educational success and mobility (ibid., p. 3).

In his review of multicultural education, Banks (1992) identified four dimensions of multicultural education:

a) *Content integration,* which involves the degree to which teachers use examples, data, and knowledge of "other" cultures to explain and illustrate concepts in their teaching. For example Banks notes that:

> In the language arts, for example, students can examine the ways in which Ebonics (Black English) is similar to or different from mainstream US English (ibid., p. 91).

b) *Knowledge construction.* This dimension emphasises the teachers' ability to enable students to understand and help them discover

how cultural assumptions etc. influence how knowledge in a particular discipline is constructed. For example, students can investigate the role of science in institutional racism in different epochs, and how science also played a role in refuting racist beliefs.

c) *Equity pedagogy* focuses on teachers' teaching or methodology for improving the academic performance of minority students. Cultural deprivation theory, cultural difference theory and at risk group theories have, during different times, inspired the developments and teaching techniques in this dimension. Banks (1992) notes that:

> Research indicates that co-operative – rather than competitive – teaching strategies help African American and Mexican American students to increase their academic achievement as well as help all students, including White mainstream students, to develop more positive racial attitudes and values (ibid., p. 92).

d) *Empowering school culture* involves examining the school culture and organisation. Its purpose is to restructure the school system in order to enable minority students from diverse racial, ethnic and gender groups to experience equality. According to Banks, it is essential to examine latent and manifest cultures and the nature of the school organisation that may nurture or obstruct minority children to experience educational equity. Among these variables, are labelling practices, participation in sport, or the existence of pockets of ethnic areas in the school, teachers' behaviour and attitudes towards ethnic minorities, testing and grouping practices. Streaming and gifted students programmes are often indicated as resulting in ethnic and racial inequality in a school.

One of the major critiques of multicultural education, according to Grinter (1992), Ratansi (1992) and Gilroy (1992), is its assumption of racism and its emphasis on prejudice and attitudes. For example, Grinter points out that:

> Multicultural education is based on the belief that racism is founded on misunderstanding and ignorance that leaves individuals open to racist misinterpretations of non-White ways of life and value systems. The philosophy attempts to promote a more positive understanding and appreciation of Black cultures and thereby begin to undermine racism (1992, p. 95).

He argues that racism is an ideology which is founded on learnt attitudes that non-White "races" are inferior. This, he argues, was constructed and is the result of the European and North American historical exploitation of non-White "races" ever since the first encounter between Europeans and non-Europeans. Grinter (1992) emphasises:

> Positive images of Black peoples are therefore unlikely to have any effect beyond covering inequalities and deprivation of human rights with a veneer of good feelings, and therefore rendering racism in the social, economic and political system more acceptable to its victims (ibid., p. 95).

Similarly Ratansi points out that:

> Prejudice, as conceptualized both in the educational literature around multiculturalism and in more specialized psychological discourse is defined as hostile or negative attitudes based on ignorance and faulty or incomplete knowledge (1992, p. 25).

This critique of multicultural education led to the emergence of the anti-racist movement in the late 70s and the 80s in Great Britain, which, as is apparent in the above description, was based on a simplistic analysis and understanding of racism in multicultural educational discourse.

The anti-racist perspective

The anti-racist perspective according to Ratansi assumed for itself a "mantle of left radicalism", and the debates between the advocates were often heated (ibid., p. 24). Anti-racist education according to Grinter:

> As a result antiracist education as a philosophy maintains that education based on individual cultural understanding will not eradicate racism, because racism is not rooted in cultural misunderstanding and negative images of Black culture ... Negative images are seen as important contributory elements to racism, but essentially as symbols rather than causes. British thinking on this issue is, from the antiracist perspective stuck at the point of negative images, rather than examining the processes that have produced significant, though unevenly distributed, elements of achievement and property in Black communities (1992, pp. 95-96).

The anti-racist perspective consequently focuses on the social structure and power relations in multicultural society, rather than on cultural understanding. Racism from the anti racist perspective is part and parcel of the social political structure that maintains inequalities (ibid.). The aim of anti-racist education, according to Grinter is to interrogate the social structures and the assumptions underlying the structures through the process of learning. In brief, to train social activists in the struggle against social injustice and inequality. He writes:

> Its emphasis is far less on the cultural content of the curriculum than on learning processes that will develop students' power of analysis and action. As Brandt points out, these processes are collaborative rather than child-centred. Antiracist education must challenge racism. Its theorists argue that thereby it develops learning skills as effective as any other version of "good education". Brandt summarizes the skills as those that can enable students to recognize and dismantle stereotypes, deconstruct the ethnocentric view of the world, and reconstruct a more just vision of society (ibid., p. 103).

But many of the critiques of the anti-racist perspective stress that the perspective assumes that people are prejudicial in every context and hold and act accordingly in a systematic manner. This view, Ratansi (1992) writes, leads to essentialising the prejudiced "others", who are then subjected to pedagogies that are intended to cure them from this problem or pathology. Instead, he argues people hold a complex and often contradictory positions vis-à-vis racial prejudice, as is apparent in the following example:

> In Philip Cohen's research (1989b) white working-class youths in south London expressed more or less sympathetic views on blacks depending on the context and topic of conversation. Talking to researchers about South Africa, they voiced sympathy for the plight of black South Africans. Talking to their mates about British blacks, they tended to complain about becoming second-class citizens in their own country (ibid., p. 26).

The anti-racist project, like multiculturalism, he argues, is based on a simplistic conceptual analysis of "race" and "racism". It universalises racial differences into "white" and "black" polarity, ignoring the different shades of "blackness" and "whiteness". But it also homogenises the experiences of the "other". In the process, it ignores the social, cultural and historical relations within but also

between the ethno-racial "other" and the western/English or Swedish "culture(s)".

The multicultural discourse in Sweden

The debate on cultural diversity in Sweden generally focuses on two issues: (1) the Swedish language, (2) the culture of the "other" (3) and more recently integrationism. In the Swedish debate the point of contention is usually on how much the "other" can assimilate or integrate or in the more extreme political discourse, the idea that certain groups or communities cannot be assimilated or accepted by the "natives". However, the mainstream discourse generally focuses on the social and economic problems facing the "immigrant" communities. For example, the culturalisation of the labour force, where a large percentage of immigrants are either unemployed or at the bottom of the labour hierarchy. This discourse, as Ålund rightly points out, tends to locate the problem in the "cultures" of these communities as is evident in the following statements :

> Discrimination in the labour market has made us aware that there are different types of citizens in our society and that some are more equal than others. This is our current multicultural home climate. The "cultural" meeting between immigrants and Swedes is commonly described in terms of cultural conflict between civilised/modern och primitive/traditional cultures. By emphasising cultural difference political discussion leads to a debate about adaptable or non adaptable "foreign" refugees and immigrants (Ålund, p. 13).

Institutional practices, racism, and discrimination are, however, increasingly being discussed and focused on in the social discourse of multiculturalism in Sweden instead of seeing the "culture" of the "other" as the problem. For example, as apparent in a debate article in DN by a prominient social democratic politician, and in an article by Christina Thor in a pedagogic journal for practitioners respectively, both emphasised this (institutional racism) aspect of the encounter between immigrants and the natives, rather than "immigrants" perceived as "culturally" different.

> In today's Sweden immigrants are refused apartments, social welfare and admission to restaurant because of their origin. But the justice system seem to be unable to deal with this illegal discrimination (DN, September 30, 1997).

> A study done last spring in Stockholm showed that the majority of teachers had negative attitude towards students with immigrant background and ethnicity (Thor, 1997, p. 26).

Apart from "culture", language is the most important identity marker of Swedishness. It is used to differentiate the "other" and in many instances is used to explain the problems faced by the "immigrant" communities in participating in the social and economic life of the Swedish society or as an obstacle in the integration of "immigrants" in the Swedish society.

> The Swedish language has for a long time functioned as a strong symbol in Sweden. Even during the middle ages, authorities limited the use of the German language in official contexts. Now it is the authorities, once again, who are pointing out that Swedish language is the glue that holds multicultural Sweden together, and which also demands that immigrants must learn Swedish as perfectly as possible and see it as a life long responsibility (Sjögren, 1997, p. 22).

Consequently, the rhetorics of blame or victimisation explicit and implicit in the social discourse of multiculturalism in Sweden are based on an understanding of the "other" as a social problem. But more importantly, the immigrating "others" adopts and internalises the social script of their identity – being the "other" and being a problem.

Habermas identifies two types of assimilationist projects and these are:

> a) assimilation to the ways in which the autonomy of the citizens is institutionalised in the recipient society and the way the public use of reason" is practised there;
>
> b) the further level of a willingness to be acculturated that is not only to conform externally but to become habituated to the way of life, practices, customs of the local culture. This means an assimilation that penetrates to the level of ethical-cultural integration and thereby has a deeper impact on the collective identity of immigrant culture (1994, p. 138).

Habermas (1994) argues that a serious democratic state should demand that immigrants socialise politically in (a) above. This will allow the protection of the "political community" by assimilating into the political culture of their host country without asking them to reject their cultural origin. The Swedish official multicultural discourse can be located in (a) or the policy of integration. This policy

acknowledges "cultural" diversity, but emphasises the need to create the necessary conditions that allows individuals to integrate. Although no one has yet figured out what the concept means, I suspect that the central idea in this policy (policy of integration) is that "immigrants" are allowed to choose or maintain their culture as long as it does not conflict with the "norm" of the indigenous society. This policy in other words, is similar to the policy of integrationism adopted in the United Kingdom in the 70s, according to Lewis:

> At its core, then, the integrationist model still had a commitment to promoting social and cultural stability in a framework in which "black" is equated with "problem" and British is equated with "white" and "Britain/UK" is equated with homogeneity (1998, p. 111).

The xenophobia apparent in the discourse of "immigrants" particularly when it comes to immigrants from the third world, not only in Sweden but also in many western European countries, sometime leads to a call for assimilable "immigrants", preferably European. In many Western democracies such as France, the United States, and the United Kingdom, for example, any child born in these countries is American, French, or British respectively. Whereas in Germany this is not the case. According to Habermas this is mainly due to the perception that:

> In France national consciousness could develop within the framework of a territorial state, while in Germany it was originally linked with the romantically inspired educated middle class notion of a *kulturnation*, a nation defined by its culture. This idea represented an imaginary unity that had to seek support in a shared language, tradition, and ancestry in order to transcend the reality of the existing small states in Germany (1994, p. 146).

The social and political discourse and rhetorics in Sweden are to a certain degree similar to the German discourse. For example, Germany, and Sweden does not regard itself as a country of immigration, despite the multicultural nature of its society. More importantly, it regards itself as a nation constructed around a common identity based on a common language and culture. This sense of national identity is explicit in the social and public discourse on immigration, immigrants and multiculturalism and citizenship in Sweden.

The aim of the study

In all forms of adult education in Sweden today, the student body is ethno-culturally diverse. Apart from Eriksson (1998), *The folk high school as a multicultural meeting place*, to my knowledge there are no studies in Sweden that have examined adult education in Sweden in relation to the ethno-cultural diversity of its present clients. I am using the term ethno-cultural diversity here in its widest meaning, i.e. a society that is multicultural, multiethnical, multiracial, multicredal and stratified, composed of individuals with different educational and social backgrounds.

The general aim of the study is consequently concerned with the meeting of "cultures" in two contexts: a unit of a folk high school and a unit of a municipal adult education. The focus of this study is to describe and understand participants' constructions, definitions and their experiences as a consequence of the definitions; in short, the labelling practices in operation in the ethno-culturally diverse contexts of the two institutions. The research revolves around the following five questions.

- How do the actors construct the "other" in talk and action: how is the "other" othered?
- What is the content of the constructions of the "other"?
- How do the actors construct their own identities?
- What do these constructions mean for the actors in relation to their participation and experience in the two schools?
- What is the institutional response vis-à-vis the ethno-cultural diversity of the two institutions?

The assumption, or the point of departure, of this study is that adult students have several identities that they have internalised as members of a particular socio-cultural group and which they use to make sense of the world around them. These identities are social constructions or are a product of a specific socio-cultural context-that is it intersubjectively constructed. This does not, however, mean that the identity allocated to the individuals or groups in a society is true, or accepted by the group or the individual thus typified. The focus of the analysis is the social practices of labelling. Simply put: how groups are differentiated in a multicultural social situation or vice versa is perceived as a reflection of social relations in that society.

The intention of this study is not to provide answers or solutions, but instead to show the complexity of the issues or problems that

arise in a culturally diverse social situation. In this study I intend to challenge not only the common sense knowledge, but also the concepts that are commonly used to describe, study and understand the social dynamics in culturally diverse social situations or society. My purpose is therefore not to tidy up the mess, but to problematise it. The constructions that are emphasised are those that are relevant from the perspective of a multicultural discourse, i.e. the themes described or raised in the introductory chapter. Other aspects of identities are thus not the focus.

Chapter 2

The theoretical perspective of the study

In chapter 1, I briefly described the different discourses on multiculturalism, all of which seek to develop a definition of pluralism, according to the following descriptors: culture, race, ethnicity, gender, class, etc. In these discourses, it is explicit that the descriptors/labels are often used by groups as markers of boundaries, including and excluding perceived non-members. But more importantly, to advance the claims of different groups for social resources, and for justice and representation/recognition for their value positions.

The focus in these discourses and in this study are conceptual descriptors and how we argue over who "we" are as a community and the labels the different social-cultural entities that constitute the multiculturality of the Swedish society with a capital S. Put simply, our understanding of ourselves as individuals in relation to publicly and experienced identities. There are a number of perspectives one can use in studying the labelling practices in a social situation. In this study, however, the approach used to understand the actors' talk in the two schools investigated is social constructionism.

Typing and constructionism

From the perspective of the history of ideas, one can trace some fundamental ideas of social constructionism to phenomenology. Phenomenology, according to Bäck-Wiklund (1995) is one of the influential philosophical orientations in social science in the 20th century. It has influenced many philosophical traditions for example, modern existentialism, structuralism, critical theory and analytical philosophy. By the publication of Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann's book, *The social construction of reality*, phenomenology became, according to Bäck-Wiklund, an important school of thought in modern sociology. I will not trace phenomenological ideas and influence on different philosophical thoughts mentioned above, but focus on typing, a central idea in this thesis, which is also found in Schutz, Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann's works. Schutz, a student of Husserl's, followed and developed Husserl's concept of

life-world, a concept that has, according to Bäck-Wiklund, become a common concept in social science today. According to Bäck-Wiklund, life world is composed of institutions, events, and socially accepted conventions that are constituted and reconstituted through human actions and unreflected acts or what Shutz calls typifications, and knowledge of the first order.

People perceive, experience and interpret the world through typifications of people, experiences etc., and all typings in our day-to-day interaction are part and parcel of an integrated socio-cultural and historical life-world, which in turn are taken for granted. In other words, our day-to-day reality are structures of interrelated typings that form our schema of thoughts and which in turn allows us to make sense and mutually understand our world.

According to Bäck-Wiklund (1995), Berger and Luckmann's theory of social construction of reality is based on the phenomenological idea that peoples subjective meanings are central to how society is constructed. They do not deny that society exists objectively for people, but that it is constructed in social interactions in our day-to-day life. In this day-to- day interaction we use different typing schemas to understand and interpret the other, and in this context language plays a major role. All of us as participants in a society have some form of knowledge about how the society functions, and what we as participants have to do for things to happen. When this action is repeated constantly it no longer becomes an individual act; it becomes a habit, giving people the luxury of not re-defining the situation anew.

Social constructionism

Social constructionism views man as an active creator or constructor of meaning and not simply as victims of social structures in a society. The basic characteristic of the approach are:

- A critical stance towards taken- for-granted knowledge.
- Historical and cultural specificity.
- Knowledge and social action go together (e.g. attitude towards immigrants).

Language is central in social constructionism, particularly in the relational turn in this approach. However, in this brief presentation I will not go into the complex discussion of whether language mirrors the world out there or the philosophy of language. My

interest in this study is not linguistic analysis of the talk, but to critically examine the concepts and content of the concepts which groups in the Swedish discourse of cultural diversity use to describe and argue over who they are in relating to each other and their consequences for the contexts of the study.

Language

Labelling practices have consequences; they denote a schema of relations. How we label things effect how we act towards them, i.e. there are expectations attached to them. For example, to be poor/poverty, a mother, disabled/abled are differentially experienced, relative and in addition depends on how the phenomenon is defined in a specific context and time. In addition, it is institutionalised; for example, to receive public assistance in most countries a person has to prove that they are poor or have no socially accepted income. In other words, a way of thinking leads to a way of doing or social policies and practices.

These organising principles (concepts) do not emerge in a vacuum, but are indications of a social stock of knowledge in a particular socio-cultural context about a social phenomenon. In that sense they have implications for the social type defined as disabled and different from the norm. This knowledge and social typings are not static, but are constantly contested. It is, however, important to emphasise that, in any particular social cultural context and time, there is a dominant paradigm vis-à-vis social phenomena. Language from a social constructionist perspective is not therefore transparent. In other words, it is, and can be contested. According to Burr (1995, p. 33):

> When people talk about "myself", their personality or some aspect of their experience, it is assumed that this self, personality and experience pre-dates and exists independently of the words used to describe it. We think of language as a bag of labels which we can choose from in trying to describe our internal state. The nature of the person and her or his internal state seem to come first.

This view of language has two implications. First, what we call personality, drives, or labels, etc. are not parts of human nature that exist independent of language. Instead, these objects, feelings etc. are made available to us through language. It determines our experiences and our consciousness is structured by it. Burr writes:

> It implies that what we take "being a person" to mean could always have been constructed differently - and indeed we live in a world in which there is still an enormous diversity of languages and ways of understanding personhood (ibid., p. 34).

Once words become attached to their concepts, they are "fixed", which explains how all the users of the same language can communicate; for example, we all know what the concept abled/disabled is. But what it socially means is not necessarily the same across, and even within different socio-cultures settings . This does not explain how words/language can change meaning over time. It can depend upon who uses it and in which context, but the concept exists, or is part and parcel of our objective/subjective world. Berger and Luckmann (1967) similarly emphasise the centrality of language in shaping the manner in which we construct, comprehend and respond to socially constructed problems by focusing on the role of labelling. Hence, my intention in this study is to problematise the common-sense concepts and labels different groups in multicultural Sweden use to describe themselves and others.

Discourse and Identity

In this study, I have often referred to discourse and constantly to the multicultural discourse in Sweden. But what is a discourse, and what is its implication for the perspective and the problem of the study. Discourse is a complex concept. It refers to a set of statements, images, stories, metaphors that construct a specific version of events. Consequently, there is rarely one version of an event, and each discourse raises a certain aspect of an event etc., or claims to be objective truth. For example, selective hunting of elephants can be viewed as an instrument for controlling the population of elephant, but it can also viewed as cruel practice and one which encourages illegal hunting and trade in ivory.

Clarke and Cochcrane (1998) similarly note that discourse is important in understanding the social construction of social problems since it focuses on the everyday meanings. They emphasise that knowledge is maintained and reproduced through texts and talk, and this is accomplished in a variety of ways, such as in political statements, movies, television programmes, social studies and in public conversations. In addition, Clark and Cochcrane stress that in order to understand social constructions in a social situation we have to distance ourselves from what we know about the society. "The defining characteristics of the strangers is that they are unaware what the 'native' takes for granted" (ibid., p. 10). For

example, the social meanings we bring into operations in dealings with things we encounter in our day-to-day life, but also the interprepational frameworks that we bring into operation that help us structure interactions with other people. In brief, the identities we allocate to people. According to Berger and Luckmann:

> Identity is a phenomenon that emerges from the dialectic between individual and society. Identity *types*, on the other hand, are social products *tout court* relatively stable elements of objective social reality (the degree of stability being of course socially mediated in its turn (1967, p. 174)

Appiah, on the other hand, points out that:

> Dialogue shapes the identity I develop as I grow up, but the very material out of which I form it (Identity, my bracket) is provided, in part, by my society, by what Taylor calls its language ... African-American identity is centrally shaped by American society and institutions; it cannot be seen as constructed solely within African-American communities. We make up selves from the tool kit of options made available to us by our culture and society. ... We do make choices, but we do not determine the options among which we choose (1994, pp. 154-155).

A social constructionist perspective of identity stresses that our identities emerge or arise out of our interactions with others in a community. It is based on language and is a consequence of interrelated discourses made available to us by the cultures that we are located in.

> People's identities are achieved by a subtle interweaving of many different "threads". There is the "thread" of age ... ethnicity, gender, of education, of sexuality and so on. All these (and many more) are woven together to produce a fabric of a person's identity ... We are the end product, the combination, of the particular "version" of things that are made available to us (Burr, 1995, p. 51).

The thread I am interested in is the common sense concepts communally used to describe and define the multicultural nature of the Swedish society, and their implications. People rarely question the perception that people are different, and that they may constitute social problems, though there may be disagreements over whether these groups of people have problems or are problems, over what kinds of problems they are, and how the problems should be dealt

with. Our own relationship to these issues is likely to have an effect on how we view them.

Everyone constantly makes assumptions about people and the nature of the social world. Usually we categorise them into types and assume that we know all sorts of things about them. This is how we go about our daily business of living, and mostly we are not aware of doing it. In the process of categorising people and ascribing meaning to those categories, we make implicit assumptions about normality, about the nature of the differences between people, about what issues constitute social problems, about the kinds of problems they are and about how they should be solved (Saraga, 1998).

Earlier I emphasised that there are many discourses vis-à-vis an event, or practices and each highlights a different aspect of social practice, as shown in chapter one. Each position in this debate and discourses contests and argues against a particular perception of "culture", "race", "ethnicity" etc. These concepts in the final analysis structure the manner in which the different groups are constructed as the same, equal or different, and these constructions have consequences for people defined as such.

Culture

"Culture" is a central ordering idea and concept in the debate, studies and discourse about the multiculturality of a society, in our case the Swedish society (see chapter one). In most of these debates and discussions the concept is taken for granted, for example, in the multicultural education discourse or multiculturalism as an ideology. This assumption of "culture" is, however, problematic. Although the concept is under serious attack in many disciplines its use in education occurs in ignorance of this conceptual criticism. Rudolf Wicker similarly writes:

> The idea of culture appears in a wide variety of contexts and has experienced a veritable boom since the 1970s, spawning a whole string of new compound words formed with multi, pluri-, inter-, and transculturalism, as well as many different ethno-fashions. Much the same thing is happening in science, where research activities dealing with the concepts of culture are multiplying and becoming increasingly differentiated (1997, p. 30).

The use of the concept, according to Rudolf Wicker, is based on the classical understanding of culture as a complex whole which

incorporates religious beliefs, customs, art, moral, etc. and its original anthropological conceptualisation is closely associated with enlightment and civilising achievement. This definition of culture he writes has led to: a) the search for cultural patterns; b) the consideration of cultures as totalities in their difference, opening for the drawing of boundaries between cultures, and cross cultural comparison, finally, c) "the ethnographic treatment of parts of these cultural wholes" (ibid., p. 31). Thus opening the way for use of culture in a simple and reified way. For example, in many discussions and debates about multiculturalism it is used to support a vision of national cultural identity, and personal and ethnic identity that is fixed, essentialised, stereotyped and normatised. The idea is that culture is something that does things to people.

This view of culture allows a normative acceptance of relativistic equality which turns a blind eye to the interdependence of cultures. More importantly it not only essentializes cultural differences, but also trivialises these differences through using the concept as a category, reducing it to cultural manifestations such as clothes, dress, music or stereotypical anecdotes. This essentialisation and categorisation of culture (culture as a property owned by an individual or a group) leads to an absurd reality and discourse. To borrow a post-modern terminology, it leads to a binary discourse.

Culture in the study of multicultural social situations, I believe has to be problematised. More importantly, culture should be viewed as a social construct, which is maintained, transmitted and reproduced in and through interactions in a collective. It is not static. Figueroa (1991) emphasises that, although culture is a social construct, cultural identity may be both objective and subjective. Objective, in the sense that a group can differ from one another in terms of language, or the religion they profess. However, within each group will be an awareness and definition of themselves as different from other groups of people. Figueroa in addition writes :

> Similarly individuals within each group will participate differentially in the group culture, depending on that individual's own social interrelating, social position, social history and experiences (ibid., p. 28).

Consequently, he views culture not as abstract values, symbols or meanings. Rather it is the meanings and symbols that underlie the everyday social living and interaction. The manner in which people interact and relate is the expression of their belief, perceptions and expectations. In that sense, culture provides, the actors with ready-made meanings and a frame of reference. Thus a different culture

and perspective can be viewed by a collective as wrong and unnatural.

The idea of "culture" as autonomous entities is being contested and seriously criticised by a number of disciplines and perspectives. In addition, it is also being undermined by international social phenomena such as migration, country to city migration, and the global flow of information through media etc. According to Wicker (1997, p. 37), "the space once perceived to be occupied by timeless, traditional essence and uniqueness is lost for ever." Another important process that undermines the idea of culture as independent entities is the hybridisation of cultures that emerges in culturally diverse social situations, but also the pressures of universalisation of norms, tastes and values as consequence of free flow of capital, goods etc., all theses processes contradicts the perception of culture as static.

Ethnicity

According to Barth (1996, p. 296) an anthropological definition or understanding of an ethnic group:

> (1) is largely biologically self-perpetuating.
>
> (2) shares fundamental cultural values, realised in overt unity in cultural forms.
>
> (3) makes up a field of communication and interaction.
>
> (4) has a membership which identifies itself, and is identified by others, as constituting a category distinguishable from other categories of the same order.

The problem with the above understanding of ethnic identity according to Barth is that it views the boundaries between ethnic groups as unproblematic.

> We are led to imagine each group developing its cultural and social form in relative isolation, mainly in response to local ecologic factors, through a history of adaption by invention and selective borrowing. This history has produced a world of separate peoples each with their culture and each organized in a society which can legitimately be isolated for description as an island by itself (ibid., p. 296).

Barth rejects the first (3) aspect of ethnic understanding listed above, he writes:

> By concentrating on what is *socially* (his italics) effective, ethnic groups are seen as a form of social organization. The critical feature then becomes item (4) ... the characteristic of self-ascription and ascription by others (ibid., p. 299).

He further adds:

> To the extent that actors use ethnic identities to categorise themselves and others for the purpose of interaction, they form ethnic groups in this organizational sense (ibid., p. 299).

Barth's perspective of ethnic groups as an organising order becomes problematic if one takes into account the dilemma faced by Vesna. Ascription is no longer unproblematic and uncontested by different groups in Vesna's social world.

> When Vesna had to introduced herself in an immigrant politicy conference, ... she said "-I am a third generation Swede; my mother was born in Sweden and her parents are immigrants from Yugoslavia. She says she is Swedish, so Swedish that she constantly must remind me of it. My father is Swedish, and his parents are native Swedes. I am 19 years old. My maternal grand-mother says that I am a Serb." In answer to the question who she thinks she is, she replied: "I am Swede-Serb." Vesna can not speak Serb-Croatian and has been raised by Swedish parents. She is now learning to be a Serb by intensively socialising with young Bosnian muslims (Ålund, p. 1). (My translation)

The above example shows the complexity of socially created boundaries. Figueroa points out that:

> "Ethnicity", like "race", refers not just to objective "characteristics" of "groups", but especially to constructed "identities" resulting from collective processes of categorisation, definition and identification - whether other-identification or self-identification (1991, pp. 54-55).

Ethnicity according to him may involve a group's self-definition, a sense of peoplehood. But this sense of peoplehood is in itself socially constructed by members of the group. It includes a collective construction of identities, common myths etc. At the same time, self-identification constitutes differentiation from the other. But this does not mean that the group labelled as different or the same

accepts or agrees with the identifications and categorisation of themselves by others. When one talks about a person as belonging to this or that ethnic group, one is using an interpretative process that might not correspond to the objective facts or the interpretative framework of the person typified as belonging to a specific ethnicity. It can be a category defining nothing but a group of people sharing the same culture or history, but it can also be a categorisation of people who differ historically and culturally. A good example are the different groups that come from the Sub-Indian continent and who are socially categorised as an ethnic group called Asians.

Ethnicity, therefore, is not just a manifestation of a sense of peoplehood a group has (through self-definition) and the related interpretative and common distortions associated with the process of self-definition, but also according to him the related identities allocated, rightly or wrongly, to others (or to the members of the collectivity by others) based on historical or cultural features real or imagined. Ethnicism and racism are therefore based on assumptions which are overgeneralised and distorted.

> The "ethnicist" frame of reference fulfils similar functions to the racist frame of reference. These includes the production and reproduction of hard boundaries, closedness, inequality and enhanced freedom for some but reduced freedom for others. In addition the use of ethnicist language - which is not usually considered objectionable - can also serve to camouflage racism at all levels (ibid., p. 57).

The social processes that construct, reproduce and maintain ethnicism and racism are similar; both are socially constructed and are transmitted in and through interaction. They are imbued in the social structure of a collective and located deep in the culture of the collective.

Race

Nearly all researchers in this area agree that "race" and "race" relations are not based on phenotypical differences and do not determine the inter-racial relation. Donald and Ratansi, for example, pointed out that:

> No persuasive empirical case has been made for ascribing common psychological, intellectual or moral capacities or characteristics to individuals on the basis of skin colour or physiognomy. Certainly, no good ethical case has been made to justify differ-

> ential or inequitable treatment on such arbitrary grounds. ... the issue is not how natural differences determine and justify group definition and interactions, but how racial logics and racial frames of reference are articulated and deployed and with what consequences (1992, p. 1).

But "race" relations, are social relations that are constructed by a collective, through interaction and within the limitation of a particular social, cultural and natural world. That is, the social underpins and is central in the construction of race relations, just like any other family of relational categories such as class, gender etc.

As emphasised earlier, the nature of social relations in a collective is the culture in action or in operation. It reflects a collective's expression of their belief system, perception and expectations. Culture, therefore, mediates the manner in which we make sense of the world, and from it we construct our frames of reference. This view, according to Figueroa, implies a voluntaristic model of society, where social action and interaction are relatively free, but he emphasises that:

> However, the freedom involved here is a limited freedom, situated biographically, historically, socially and culturally. My options are options mediated by my culture, which for me is in a sense a given that I learn in and through interaction with others, but which is also produced and modified, which is realized in and by such interaction-to which I am a party. My alternatives are created, opened up and constrained in and by my relation to and with others (ibid., p. 29).

Choice, he argues, does not mean a means-ends calculation, nor maximisation of self-advantage etc. People can act to another person's advantage, group advantage, for a specific cause, attitude, out of anger, under the influence of others etc. But, on the other hand, because they may have control over a particular social resource, they may be able to impose their definitions, intentions, values, culture etc., as they wish. Power in this sense means much more than the control over production, but includes control of what is valued, and what is valued in a collective is a function of a culture, e.g. a collective's views on fashion or race relation. Chesnut illustrates this point in describing who is defined as "white" or "black" in the United States, and what that means in terms of social privileges, in a context where "whiteness" is valued.

> In Ohio, before the civil war, a person more than half-white was legally entitled to all the rights of a white man. In South

> Carolina, the line of cleavage was left somewhat indefinite; the color line was drawn tentatively at one fourth of Negro blood, but this was not held conclusive. The term "mulatto"; said the Supreme Court of that State in a reported case, is not invariably applicable to every (admixture) of African blood with the European, ... the question whether persons are colored or white, where color and features are doubtful, is for the jury to determine by reputation, by reception into the society , and by their exercises of the privileges of a white man as well as by admixture of blood (1996, p. 27).

In the above example, it is apparent that "race" and race relations are socially constructed, regulated, maintained, institutionalised and re-produced like any other social phenomena and are deeply located in the culture of the collective or society. It is also evident that it is the dominant culture/group that defines who is "white" and who is not. Dominant does not and should not be construed as a majority group in a society. A good example, is the system of apartheid in South Africa.

Emphasising that race is mediated in and through a racist frame of reference does not, according to Figueroa (1991), negate the existence of different looking people, but what is important is the meaning attributed to the differences through interaction, the significance of the pattern of relations established, the boundaries that are drawn and assumptions and myths that underlie and inform the relations and boundaries. Implicit in race are not only assumptions, myths, stereotyping etc., but actual patterns of relationship and power distribution, which reproduces, generates and sustains it.

In Dickar's article: *Teaching in our Underwear: the liabilities of whiteness in the multi-racial classrooms* she analyses the experience of Emily Sachar, focusing on the frame of reference she brings into play in her narrative in: *Shut up and Let the Lady Teach.* In this narrative, Sachar pointed out that:

> When I learned that I would be teaching in a school where half the faculty and 90% of the students where black, I tried to examine my own racial attitudes and thoughts. Was I prejudiced? Might I say the wrong thing to the wrong people? How would I fit? (1991, pp. 1-2).

According to Dickar, Sachar's concern about saying the wrong thing implies or suggests that if she was teaching in a white school, she would not be burdened or concerned with the above anxiety. The wrong people in this case were the people of colour. According to

Dickar, the white environment vis-à-vis Sachar was safe, but that dominated by people of colour was dangerous.

> Her anxiety about her ability to offend and her inability to know what was the right thing to say suggests that she perceived the world of face to face race relations as murky terrain which she must navigate without a map. The ease with which she hitherto sailed through her professional life as a journalist was grounded in her whiteness and in an environment where whiteness was suspect and scrutinized, it became a liability (ibid., p. 2).

I agree with much of Dickar's analysis, however, although much of Sachar's anxiety is grounded in her "whiteness" and what it means in the collective memories of blacks and whites in the United States. But this process is, however, not one side. Both groups bring into play the abstractions, assumptions and generalisations that are socially and culturally associated with the different groups in the American society.

Institutions

According to Berger and Luckmann (1967) social constructions become solidified through three interrelated processes: habitualisation, institutionalisation and sedimentation. Habitualisation precedes institutionalisation. According to Berger and Luckmann habitualisation is a process where activities are routinised ordered and made predictable to the members of a collective, so that these activities can be patterned, reproduced and made available to the members of the collective. Institutions are in that sense created by members of a collective and it basically orders social reality, without which, the world, according to Katz (1996), is meaningless to the members of a collective.

The routinised (habitualised) activities, consequently, have meaning for the individual, and become part of his general stock of knowledge, for future use if necessary, and in turn allows the member of the collective the luxury of not re-defining each situation anew. Institutions are created when there is a mutual typification of actions and implies a common and shared history in the routinisation process (Berger and Luckmann, 1967). In other words, it does not arise instantaneously. However, institutions can also be created by or through political power, such as the institutions of apartheid, etc.

Apart from the historical context of institutions, according to Berger and Luckmann, their very existence means that a particular aspect of human action has been defined, patterns of conduct of what is acceptable or not acceptable have been established for the members of the collective – in brief, the control aspect of institution. Institutions, however, generally precede the individual members of the collectives, (it was there when they were born and most likely when they die, but at the same time this does not mean that institutionalisation is a continuous process – de-institutionalisation can occur). They are part of individuals' objective world; they act on it and it acts on them.

> Institutions are understood by all members of society, although not necessarily in the same way. They set the limits of control, and channel social experiences, for example, although not everybody in Western society marries , sexual relationships are defined to some extent by the institution of marriage. Similarly, racist beliefs are institutionalised and become part of the social fabrics (Katz, 1996, p. 29).

Because institutions do not exist in a vacuum, but are part of human action, both Berger and Luckmann (1967) and Katz (1996) emphasise that they have to be justified or legitimised.

> Legitimation is the set of values, beliefs and norms surrounding all institutions which places them into a larger social order by relating them to other institutions. Legitimation strengthens the normative power of institutions, thus providing:
>
> - the "knowledge" of the institutions (e.g. To what race do I belong); and
>
> - the value surrounding the institution (e.g. Is it wrong to marry a member of another race?).
>
> The major legimitising factor in all institutions is language (Katz, 1996, p. 29) .

Berger and Luckmann in addition point out that:

> Language objectivates the shared experiences and makes them available to all within the linguistic community, thus becoming both the basis and the instrument of the collective stock of social knowledge. Further more, language provides the means for objectifying new experiences, allowing their incorporation into the already existing stock of knowledge, and it is the most important means by which the objectivated and objectified

> sedimentations are transmitted in the tradition of the collectivity in question (1967, p. 68).

The label "immigrant", for example, is a common typificatory label that is used by the actors and the institutions not only to differentiate but to order the multicultural social world. For example, according to Abdallah-Pretceille:

> After dealing with "immigrant" children then the children of second generation immigrant, schools and teachers are only restating, although in different ways, the same problem or more exactly, that of being the "other (1992, p. 33).

For instance, this problem of being the "other" is evident in the creation of "immigrant" programmes in school, such as the SFI programme and other programmes targeting immigrants, the lack of recognition of "immigrants" professional and educational identity etc. All these programmes and related discursive practices legitimise and sediment the notion of immigrants as different in relation to the "natives" or as Abdallah-Pretceille notes above being the "other".

Biological and Cultural Racism

In the above discussion on culture, race , and ethnicity, I touched on the idea of racism, or more precisely, the idea of a racist frame of reference, without defining and discussing what I mean with racism. About three decades ago, the idea of racism was clear cut – it was a way of thinking and acting based on the notion of human races, their difference, ranking of races and people in terms of their phenotypical characteristics or genetic make up (Wieviorka, 1997). This is, or was, the classical era of biological racism.

Carter and Williams (1987) and Figueroa (1991), among others, emphasise that the core of racism is the ascription of characteristics, biological and, more recently, cultural as a determinant of group and individual action or behaviour. These characteristics are seen as immutable and unchangeable, because they are derived from the racial characteristic of the group or the race that the individual is typified as belonging to. They also emphasise that "racism" is not the result of the fact that people are phenotypically different, but instead are socially constructed. This conceptualisation of racism and race relations is in line with the perspective of this study. It stresses that in order to understand adequately the idea of race

relations and racism one has to emphasise the social construction of "race":

> Race is therefore constructed through a process of ascription. An attribute (skin colour, religion, country of origin, language) becomes the basis of an individual's identity. It thus considered to be an unalterable feature of those human beings so defined: for example, greed comes to be regarded as an aspect of Jewishness; criminality comes to be regarded as an aspect of "West Indianess". Racism is therefore more than the sum of individual prejudice; it becomes an organising principle of popular consciousness ... (Carter and Williams, 1987, p. 177).

Implicit in the above perspective of race relation and racism includes the conceptualisation of racism that is not solely based on the classical biological understanding of racism, but includes the notion of cultural racism, or what many writers in this field call "neo-racism". According to Gilroy "cultural racism", or the present new forms of racism rarely represents the other in terms of overt racial difference or hierarchy. He emphasises that:

> We must be prepared to focus unsentimentally on antiracism's inability to respond to other distinctive aspects of these new forms of racism. Apart from the way that racial meanings are inferred rather than stated openly, these new forms are distinguished by the extent to which they identify race with the term "culture" and "identity", terms which have their own resonance in anti-racist orthodoxy (1992, p. 53).

Central in the notion of "race" relation, is a racist frame of reference, which according to Figueroa is deeply lodged in a culture – a world view:

> Central to these socials constructions, according to the present view, are certain largely taken for granted understandings which are shared by in-group members, are closely associated with group identity, and provide as it were a basic backdrop to perception, knowledge, judgement and action. These operate at the level of culture and are central to an understanding of racism and ethnicism (1991, p. 30).

Individual, interpersonal, and institutional dimensions of racism

Figueroa (1991) argues that, besides the cultural dimension of racism, one can discern the individual, the interpersonal, the institutional and the structural dimensions. The individual dimension of racism involves the prejudice or generalisations individuals operate with. According to him racism is not only an individual system of belief or prejudice, but also involves the manner in which the in-group defines and differentiate itself in relation to the out-group, whereas at the interpersonal level or dimension it operates in or at the level of.

> ... At the interpersonal level of racism are interaction, communications, and interrelations - on the basis of, within the terms of, or according to (and conversely generating and sustaining) a racist frame of reference. Such interactions, communication and interelations may either be with in-group members or with those construed as belonging. ... For example, certain forms of behaviour or relations will be seen as more appropriate with in-group than out-group members. Thus it has been found that friendship patterns among pupils often follow "ethnic" group boundaries (pp. 31-32).

At the institutional level racism is built into the organisation, rules or processes in a society, which disadvantages a particular group and is based on or influenced by the racist frame of reference in operation in the group. Finally, structural racism is reflected in the way or manner in which a society is patterned vertically or horizontally along "racial" lines, particularly vis-à-vis the distribution of social resources. An example of a cultural, individual, and interpersonal racism in the complexity of "race" relations in the United States is apparent in the following incident described by Chesnut:

> A little incident that occurred not long ago near Boston will illustrate the complexity of these race relations. Three light-colored men, brothers ... living in Boston suburb, married respectively a white, a brown and a black woman. The woman with the white mother became known as "white", and associated with white people. The others were frankly colored ... Curiously enough, one afternoon, the three sets of Green children - the white Greens, the brown Greens and the black Greens- were detained after school and were all directed to report to a certain school room, where they were assigned certain tasks at a blackboards about the large room ... Still more curiously, most of the teachers of the school happened to have business in

> this particular room on that particular afternoon, and all of them seemed greatly interested in the Green children. "Well, well did you ever think! Just think of it! And they are all first cousins!" was remarked audibly. ... They reported (children) to their parents the incident and a number of remarks of a similar tenor to the above quoted. The result was a complaint to the school authorities and a reprimand to several teachers. A curious feature of the affair lay in the source from which the complaint emanated. One might suppose it to have come from the white Greens; but no, they were willing that the incident should pass unnoticed and be promptly forgotten; publicity would only advertise a fact which would work to their social injury. The dark Greens rather enjoyed the affair; they had nothing to lose ... The complaint came from the Brown Greens; The reader can figure out the psychology of it for himself (1996, p. 26).

In defining a situation actors bring into play not only the social stock of knowledge that is culturally available to them. But they also bring their feelings, judgement or action which they think is relevant, for example, in their interaction with a person of colour or the various shades of white, as evident in the above example. In short individuals bring into play their belief vis-à-vis inter-race sexuality, and a perspective on hybridity as a normal or an abnormal product of the union between the races.

This interpretational map or frame of reference, according to Figueroa (1991), should not be seen as individualistic or subjective, but part of the social interaction in which they are constructed and are commonly shared or recognised by the members of the in-group. This in turn involves assumption that:

> ... there do actually exist objectively different races; these share "by nature" (or genetically or inherently) certain common characteristics; the different "races" are mutually exclusive if not hierarchically ordered; each person belongs to one (and only one) such "race", thereby possessing certain physical and cultural characteristics and typically occupying a certain social location (ibid., p. 35).

That is, if one defines a situation in terms of race, ipso facto one brings into play abstractions, assumptions or world views about the other, or a race-based framework of defining and understanding the situation. For example, Blacks are good at sports, or dancing etc.

Power and Reality

The concepts of reality and power are referred to or mentioned without lodging them in the theoretical perspective of the study. This is essential since the two concepts are traditionally used as a critique of social constructionism. According to Gergen (1994, p. 72):

> The typical objection leveled at constructionist - often accompanied by a self-satisfied smirk or a display of righteous indignation - is its seeming absurdity in the face of an obdurate reality ... Are you denying the existence of poverty, disease and hunger in the world? Death is part of human existence. It is pure nonsense to say it is a social construction. Do you mean to say that there is no world out there. We are just making it up.

The above common objection, according to Gergen, is grounded on a misunderstanding of constructionism. Constructionism neither denies the world out there nor affirms it. It is ontologically mute. The moment we start talking about what is out there, he notes "we enter the world of discourse and the process of construction begins" (ibid, p. 72).

Similarly social constructionism is criticised for being insensitive to power relations in a society. However, Gergen argues that social constructionism deserves or should scrutinize power relations in a society. But he points out that:

> The hesitation in presuming that power should be a grounding concept within the metatheory, a concept without which a constructionist sensitivity cannot be set in motion. To what does the concept of power refer? It is after all multiply constructed (ibid., p. 73).

He also stresses that power as a concept is essentially contested. For example, he notes that there is a variety of perspectives vis-à-vis power, Machiavellian, Marxist, Parssonian and a Foucaudian to name a few. In addition, these concepts, he argues, are used by different interest groups for often contradictory purposes.

> Within any group the concept of power can be reified, with significant consequences for that group's activities (ibid., p. 73).

Similarly, in this study I acknowledge differential power relations within the multicultural context, but also the multiplicity of realities in such a context. I do not claim or assert that one position or discourse is objective or has access to the truth. My attempt here is

to disrupt the common sense constructions by focusing on and problematising the labelling practices in operation in the multicultural social situation of the two schools investigated. As a result, I hope to start a dialogue and debate, as Gergen stresses on the need to change the rhetorics of cultural diversity and the manner in which the different groups are today defined and constructed as different or the same.

The dissertation is structured to address primarily the tension between the collective constructions and individual construction of their identity in the multicultural discourse. The "Us" and "Them" dichotomy and its inadequacy is the focus of chapter 5 and chapter 6. But in chapter 6 the focus is not on the collective identity per se but on the social meanings imbedded in the categories that are used to define the "other" as different from the "native". Chapter 7 presents 8 portraits of students, four from each school. This chapter, emphasises the students' constructions of their identities, experiences and their realities in the two schools studied. Chapter 8 the main result of the study is summarised and discussed using literature in the area.

It is important to point out that the actions of individuals are not simply viewed as a response to external or internal stimul , such as personality traits, psychological needs, and social norms, that are structurally or culturally determined. But it is a subjective construction through a process of definition and interpretation which maintains and transforms meanings and actions of a collective's social life. In other word, the social life is dynamic rather than static and actors are active constructors of meanings and not passive objects at the mercy of structures, situations or culture(s).

Theoretically, this study is inspired by a number of theories such as critical theory (Troyna), symbolic interactionism(Blumer), post modernism (Ratansi and Brah), social constructionism (Berger and Luckmann, Figueroa, Burr). All these theories have one thing in common– that is social constructionism is a central and an important part of these theories.

Theoretical implications and structure of the study

In the theoretical approach, I discussed a number of concepts (identity, race, culture, and ethnicity) which are used and problematised as analytical tools to explore the actors' talk. The concepts are viewed as categories that indicate social relations in a multicultural

social situation, and the meanings of these categories are socially constructed in a specific socio-cultural context.

Race or ethnicity are common terms that are used to indicate primarily a group of people identified in the discourse as "different", an indication of a frame of reference, a manner in which the groups in multicultural social situation are visualised and viewed as different or strange. All these concepts are relational and attain their meaning in a social context, the multiracial or multicultural social situation and discourse, i.e. the meanings of the concepts do not emerge in a vacuum.

Central in the typifications is an understanding of self and collective identity. My identity is constructed and mediated to me through interaction. But more importantly, the manner in which I am categorised, typified as same, equal, or different etc., has social consequences, in terms of my possibilities and alternatives in a society. In the meeting between actors in the multicultural social situation, there are or exist an incipient abstraction of the "other". This existed even prior to the face to face meeting with the "other" in a specific space (in this case the two educational institutions investigated) through popular literature, historical accounts, adventures, narratives of the "other" in real or imagined encounters. These abstractions generally inform the actions of the actors in the meeting, but this does not necessarily mean that every individual interprets this culturally specific information or knowledge in the same manner and relates to the "other" accordingly. Symbols are essential in constructing meanings in the social life of a group and they can be verbal or non-verbal, abstract or concrete. According to Blackledge and Hunt (1985):

> Meanings, thoughts, are not private since we obtain a set of ready-made meanings or interpretation from our ancestors. One important set of interpretations is the system we use to categorise other people (pp. 239-240).

Although meanings are given or are socially constructed, they are subjective, i.e. individuals interpret the collective norms or attitudes in a collective or as Beach points out:

> We understand life through understanding the acts of others on things and from the responses other people are seen by us to make to the things we do. Thus what happens in interactions cannot just be attributed to roles, motives or social structures but have to be understood on the basis of interpretative work ... 1995, p. 9).

The categories we allocate to people are social constructions which serve or function to differentiate "immigrants" in relation to the "native", and the difference is mediated to the different groups in a social setting through interaction. In culturally diverse societies the relations between the actors are mediated through the talk and the rhetorics of multicultural discourse in a specific society, in this case Sweden, and it involves an understanding of the various groups in relation to each other.

According to Figueroa (1991), a complex multicultural society like the United Kingdom or Sweden, where different life styles, languages, religion, social values, ethnicity etc. live side by side, can be characterised by ethnicism, racism, inequality, conflict, closedness, powerlessness etc. In order to uncover manifestations of such attitudes or tendencies, and adapt a strategy to deal with them (a multicultural education or anti-racist education etc.), it is essential to uncover (typificatory schema they use) the explicit and implicit meaning imbedded in the manner in which the individuals are othered as a collective and essentialised as different. Similarly, according to Saraga (1998), social constructions have real consequences, and these are:

> - How people see themselves and understand their own experience; what choices or options they feel they have; and how they are seen by others (their subjectivities and subject position).
>
> - The extent to which people are included or excluded from a range of social relationships and activities or from imaginary groupings such as "the nation".
>
> - The way in which they are imbedded in concrete policies and practices which in turn reinforce (solidify) the social constructions on which they are based (p. 204).

In this study, the notion of ethnic/cultural groups as actual autonomous entities or totalities such as: Swedish, Iranian, etc., are too diffuse, and cannot be viewed as historically independent cultural patterns that one can define as purely Somali, Iranian or so forth. But what is important in this context is the fact that in the meeting between the immigrants and the Swedish society both groups find themselves in a new social situation which leads to mutual typification, and constructions of identities, boundaries etc. At the same time, the "immigrating" others are forced to re-define themselves in the new social context. Simply put, they have to construct their reality(ies) and identities in the new social situation. The construc-

tion of reality involves the definition of the situation and acting on the basis of the definition.

Thomas's dictum, "If men define social reality as real, they are real in their consequence" (In Woods, 1983, p. 7) is one of the central ideas in social constructionism. Whatever the situation is (objective circumstances), if a person defines a situation in a particular manner, it will be the context that informs his/her action. Consequently, by defining immigrants as different, culturally or ethnically etc., it has consequences for the person defining and the defined.

Chapter 3

The ethnographic approach

Introduction. What do ethnographers do?

In human sciences, there are a number of research approaches which can be roughly divided into two groups: quantitative and qualitative research methodologies. According to Wolcott (1992) qualitative research tradition is not a field of study, but encompasses a variety of ideas on how to conduct qualitative research. Among them are ethnography, grounded theory, ethnomethodology, phenomenology etc.

The research approach I used in this study was ethnography. In ethnography, there is, however, no consensus on how to conduct and write an ethnographic text across disciplines or traditions. Beach (1995) writes:

> (i) Ethnography can be developed along a number of lines within different disciplines and traditions and that no one discipline or tradition can claim monopoly on how ethnography should be done or written. (ii) Approaches are always open to critique, particularly were scant effort has been made to really understand the differences and similarities between ones ideas and ideas developed in (similar) fields of praxis by others. And (iii) research methods are formed dialectically in relation to developing understanding of researched objects, subjects, places and spaces (ibid., p. 11).

This lack of consensus, however, tells us very little about what the ethnographer does. In this brief presentation, it is not my intention to outline and discuss the different aspects of the ethnographic approach, but to highlight what I did in the field, why, and to discuss it from an ethnographic perspective.

Beach (1995), Hammersley and Atkinson (1983), and Roos (1994), to name a few, emphasise that the approach uses a wide range of data from different sources, such as, observation, interviews, diaries, questionnaires, artifacts, etc., to shed light on events or issues a researcher is interested in. As a method, ethnography is usually said to develop "cultural maps" by participating in the life of a social group for a period of time, observing them first hand, or asking questions of events as the group go about their daily life. As a methodology:

> ... ethnography (or participant observation, a cognate term) is simply one social research method, albeit a somewhat unusual one, drawing as it does on a wide range of sources of information. The ethnographer participates, overtly or covertly, in people's daily lives for an extended period of time, watching what happens, listening to what is said, asking questions; in fact collecting whatever data are available to throw light on the issues with which he or she is concerned (ibid., 1983, p. 2).

Hence, conducting an ethnographic research requires, first and foremost, the presence of the researcher in the field. This requirement is associated with anthropology and generally means long-term fieldwork, the purpose of which is to understand how acts can be understood differentially from another cultural perspective (Alvesson and Sköldberg, 1994). Although this condition is not a point of contention, it is, however, defined differently. Larsson (1998), in his review of field research, notes that the how aspect of ethnography – how to conduct ethnographic research and the importance of long-time presence in the field dominates the literature on ethnography at the expense of writing. The idea that ethnographers are neutral reporters of facts or reality has been undermined or is no longer viable. More and more the text and the writer's role is instead increasingly taking centre stage in the research process, and have become an important indicator of quality in qualitative research or studies.

In addition, different ethnographic approaches, according to Alvesson and Sköldberg (1994), place different weight on empirical richness and detail.

> But even a short period observation is now regarded as ethnography. Silverman even goes further and calls ethnography all research that involves observation of events in natural situations, and which recognises the mutual dependence of theory and data. He wants, as a consequence, to distance himself from the view of observation or participant observation as a pure technique (ibid., p. 109).

Alvesson and Sköldberg identify different types of ethnography. Inductive ethnography, according to them, emphasises the volume of qualitative data, whereas, on the other hand, interpretive ethnography, critical ethnography and postmodern ethnography emphasise interpretation, critical reflection, and representational and narrative problematics.

An important aspect of ethnographic methodology is the flexibility of the researcher in relation to the data. Consequently, in writing this part of the study, I do not want to give the impression

that the research process was lineal, that I had a methodology in the traditional sense, which I followed step by step or mechanically.

For example, when I started my fieldwork in Komvux and the folk high school, my research problem was formulated in very general terms. This was intentional, as it allowed me not only the flexibility required to fine-tune my research problem in relation to the data collected, but more importantly to avoid methodological fixation at the expense of the research problem. This, however, does not mean that the collection of the data was haphazard and had no relation to my research interest. According to Hammersley and Atkinson (1983) the research problem can be changed or abandoned in this tradition as a result of a number of factors:

> Changes in research problems stem from several different sources ... it may be discovered that the original formulation of the problem was founded on erroneous assumptions. Equally, it may be concluded that, given the current state of knowledge, the problem is not soluble (pp. 33-34).

Similarly, Roos (1994), in her study, pointed out that:

> I want, however, to point out that during the research process on a number of occasions I have departed from the original research plan when the result of the study influenced the next. Periodically I have been in more or else fruitful sidetracks, not directly related to the study, which nowadays are accepted characteristics not only of qualitative studies but also of quantitative studies ... (p. 52).

At the beginning of the fieldwork I focused on the pattern of interaction and at that stage observations were the dominant technique and type of data collected. After a couple of months I became interested in patterns of interaction, particularly the ethnic segregation and marginalisation of the non-native students. Although describing the pattern is interesting per se, I decided to elicit the perspectives and frame of references the actors brought in interacting with the "other". In other words, the frame of reference the actors operated with in constructing the "other" as different and same. This focus, therefore, led to the emphasis in this study on the interview data, rather than observational data.

Fortunately in this study, I was never in a position to abandon the direction, or types of data collected, in relation to my research problem. At an early stage in the fieldwork I stumbled on an event, or a social phenomenon; the lack of interaction between the actors ("immigrant" – "Swede", non-interaction). I observed this process

in the folk high school on the first day of the fieldwork, and decided to focus on it in Komvux also. The lack of interaction between the students, or social segregation between minority and majority groups in culturally diverse societies, has always been defined as a problem (ghettoization, lack of integration, whatever the concept means etc.). This social phenomenon is generally attributed to, or located in, the identity or perceived cultural difference of the marginalised group from the norm in the public debate or discourse. This often leads to policies, programmes etc. to counteract the perceived segregation of the immigrants.

Entry in the field

My entry into the research settings (the folk high school and Komvux) was arranged by a colleague and my supervisor. Before I began my fieldwork in both settings, I met with the directors of the institutions concerned and discussed my research idea with them. The purpose was not only to gain access, but also to elicit their help in identifying the appropriate location and level for my study. Both the folk high school and Komvux have a number of units located in different parts of the town. The folk high school, for example, has three units in different locations and the programmes in these locations have different profiles. The boarding school, and immigrant women education centre are located just outside the town and the day folk high school is located in the centre of the town. Both the director of the folk high school and the head teacher at the day folk high school recommended the day folk high school due to the multicultural nature of its student body.

In the same meeting, they urged me to meet with the teachers and present my research programme to them, since it was their decision to allow me to observe their classes. A few weeks before I began my preliminary study at the school, I presented my research idea to the teachers. All the teachers, except one, were positive to my request. In retrospect I was scared of my presentation to the teachers, because I did not have a concrete research problem. Simply put, I could not concretely tell the them what I was studying or what my research problem was. At that point I had a general idea about what I wanted to study and I did not know how they were going to react to this lack of a clear-cut research problem. My suspicion, or fear, was not completely unfounded, as I will point out later in discussing my field relations with the participants in the two schools.

Entry into the municipal adult education (Komvux) followed the same pattern. The only difference was that instead of meeting the teachers as a group, I met the teachers individually and all of them were recommended to me by the director of the school. All teachers recommended to me agreed to participate in the research, before I had met them. When I met them, I briefly discussed my research idea with them, and requested basic documents such as the timetable for their classes, the list of students, and if they had any background documents on the students. One of the teachers had incomplete background data for the students in her class, which she gave to me, whereas the other teachers did not have any.

It is important to stress that my intention was not to conduct a study of immigrants in Swedish adult education. This was a conscious choice on my part. A study designed (that focuses on immigrants) in such a manner, I believe, would perpetuate the dichotomy of "immigrant" and "Swede" that is common in the public conversation in Sweden. In addition I wanted the participants in this study to reflect the diversity of the Swedish society, and, more importantly, I hoped that this diversity would capture and produce a variety of data that would reflect the complexity of social relations in diverse societies.

According to Hammersley and Atkinson (1983), access to a research field does not simply mean a presence in a research setting. Similarly, Roos (1994, p. 63) noted that: "To get permission does not mean getting access."

I discovered this fact the hard way. In my naïvety, I thought that I would be part of the group of students or teachers, that is, the participants would accept me with open arms. This, however, was not the case in both contexts. I was tolerated by the actors. I had to ask or approach them. None of the actors came to me without me taking the initiative. In short, I did not have a mentor, or informants, in both contexts, like Doc in Whyte's (1981) study. Roos (1994) in her study also noted that:

> Permission to conduct research by the director of the social service did not mean that the people in the study were willing to cooperate. In addition, those who cooperated did not always feel committed, but did what they thought they were expected to do by the management in the municipality (p. 63).

In a research setting, it is essential to identify different settings that require the researchers' attention, particularly if the principal actors behave differently in the different settings. A good example is the classroom and the staff-rooms, as two different settings where

teachers and students act differently. Therefore, it is important for the researcher to sample all the different contexts in a setting. In this study, I did focus on two contexts, the classroom and outside the confines of the class, but within the environment of the school. I have, for example, not visited the students in their homes, or observed them during their leisure time outside the school context.

The fieldwork started in August 1995, and ended in May 1996 (one academic year) and was conducted simultaneously in both settings. That is, I spent a couple of hours in each school every day in the first three months of the first term. In the first week of the fieldwork, however, I spent the whole week in the folk high school. This was due to administrative delays in identifying appropriate classes in Komvux and teachers willing to participate in the research project. After three intensive months in both contexts, I spent the following four month at least three days per week in both schools, not necessarily at both places on the same day. I would spend one day in Komvux and the following day in the folk high school, or vice versa. The third observation day was used as a day for interviews. The bulk of the interview was conducted in the last three months of the fieldwork. The last two months of the academic year I spent nearly every day in the two contexts, depending upon the schedule of the classes I was following.

Field relations with the participants

I have no idea how the "native" actors perceived me. However, from what I could read from their reaction, they kept some distance from me at the beginning, and only gradually accepted me. During the time I was in the field, they rarely volunteered any information, unless I asked them. In hindsight, I believe my lack of a sponsor made it easier for me to interact with the actors on their own terms, without an interpreter like Doc. Being identified with a group or a person would have made my field-work difficult, particularly in the folk high school, where cliques quickly emerged. Hammersley and Atkinson noted that:

> Even the most friendly and co-operative of gatekeepers or sponsors will shape the conduct and development of the research. To one degree or another, the ethnographer will be channeled in line with the existing networks of friendship, and enmity, territory, and equivalent boundaries. Having been taken up by a sponsor, the ethnographer may find it difficult to achieve independence from such a person (1983, p. 73).

My relationship and experiences with the actors in both settings were similar in many ways, but also different. The difference was mainly due to the context of the two schools. For example, the folk high school is a relatively small institution with about 100 students, and the number of teachers in a working day is less than 10. In addition, the culture of the school emphasised social relations between the students, but also between students and teachers in an organised fashion, with common activities, such as nature walks (friluftsdagar) etc. In Komvux, on the other hand, the number of students is in the thousands, and nearly 20 or more teachers work in the school (I was in) in a particular day. There were practically no social activities that brought the students together or allowed the students and teachers to socialise outside the academic sphere or the classroom.

Although, as pointed out above, my relation with the actors was influenced by their reaction, this did not stop me from consciously working to gain their acceptance. The role of the detached observer that I adopted at the initial stage (the first three weeks of the study) was not working. In the first two months in the folk high school I worked consciously to break my marginalisation. I did this by first identifying three male native students that the majority of the students respected. Secondly, I worked to get to know them.

To get to know these students I had to observe their habits, and I noticed that during the lunch breaks two of them usually had lunch in the town rather than in the school. I waited for them and accompanied them into the town a couple of times. During these short walks into the town, I never talked about my research, or asked them any questions related to the school etc. Then one day one of them asked what I was doing. I described to them in very general terms my research interest, and then he asked me: "Do you write everything you see or hear." "As much as I a can, " I replied. But I added, "I cannot see or hear everything." I made a point to join these two students as they interacted with the other students during their free time. After some time my relation with the students relaxed, they rarely dispersed or changed the topic of their conversation when they noticed I was approaching them. In addition, I decided that when I started interviewing the students I would begin with these three first. My gut feeling was that these students were the key; if they participated, all the other students would do so.

My relations with the teachers were similar to those with the students. They were polite and answered all the questions I asked them and gave me whatever documents and help I requested. I did not develop any close relationship with any particular individual

teacher. In both settings, no teacher volunteered any information unless I requested it. Several times during my fieldwork, particularly in the folk high school, more than one teacher asked me what I was studying, although I had explained my research problem to them at the start of the fieldwork and once again during the fieldwork.

In the first few weeks, the teachers in both settings took time to explain to me what they were doing and why. This made me self-conscious. Several times during the first few weeks of the fieldwork, I stopped taking notes because on several occasions I saw some of the teachers looking and explaining things to me. But this type of behaviour stopped after one or two months into the fieldwork. My interpretation of their action was that they did not want me to misunderstand what they were doing, or they perceived me as an expert, or both. What was obvious, however, was that they were conscious of my presence in the class, and of my role. According to Hammersley and Atkinson (1983):

> Gatekeepers, sponsors, and the like (indeed, most of the people who act hosts to the researcher) will operate in terms of expectations about the ethnographer's identity and intentions. Many hosts have highly inaccurate, and lurid, expectations of the research enterprise, especially of ethnographic work. Two closely related models of the researcher tend to predominate in this context, "the expert" and "the critic". Both images can conspire to make the gatekeeper uneasy as to the likely consequences of the research, and the effects of its conduct (p. 75).

Compared to the folk high school, it was much easier to interact with the students in Komvux in general, and in particular the male students, irrespective of their cultural background. But the interesting fact is that it was always the immigrant students who came to me with spontaneous comments about the teachers and the school. It was very rare for Swedish students to volunteer such information, whether female or male. The Swedish students, irrespective of gender and immigrant women, rarely took contact with me unless I initiated it. The suspicion of the actors noted above can be also attributed to my identity, and probably gender, in relation to immigrant women.

> Ethnicity, like gender, sets its limits and poses its problem. Ethnicity is, of course, not merely a matter of physical characteristics, but also implies a matter of culture, power, and personal style (ibid., p. 88).

Being an immigrant helped with the non-native students. They talked to me as if I was one of them. "We", the immigrants, was often used to construct their reality, and to differentiate themselves from the natives. Sometimes it was difficult to deal with the personal problems they had, but I had no choice but to lend a sympathetic ear, and politely change the topic without appearing to be rude or insensitive

The recording of the data

In ethnography, field notes are the most common way of producing data. In practice, this activity is not a straightforward act of recording what you see and hear. Moreover, it is impossible to hear and see everything in the field, even if you overcome the suspicion of the actors. Researchers, therefore, have no choice but to sample and select situations or contexts that they think may provide data that is relevant to the research problem. Due to the organisation of the two settings, I was forced to make certain choices in terms of the context.

In folk high school, I chose to focus on three contexts; the classroom, the staffroom and student lounges. But in Komvux I focused on three contexts, the classroom, the school cafeteria, and students' smoking area. I disregarded the staffroom in Komvux because there were too many teachers during the break, and on the couple of times I was in the staffroom, only one of the teachers whose class I was observing was there. Three teachers in the folk high school and four teachers in Komvux were observed. The choice of classes was made on the basis of the following two criteria:

- the classes had to be multicultural
- the possibility to follow a group of students in a particular programme for one academic year.

In both schools, the basic education programme (primary education programme) was chosen because it satisfied the first criterion. It was difficult to fulfil the second criterion in Komvux, because of the nature of the organisation of the school. For example, a student can take English at secondary level, maths at primary level, and at different times, during the day or at night. In brief, it was impossible to get a group of students that stayed together and attended different classes for one academic year. The programme in the folk high school is also to a certain degree organised around courses and level of ability, but I was able to get three subject areas where the group as whole (at the primary level) attended.

In Komvux I chose a base group, the English class, and I looked at the different subjects in the basic education programme where I could identify students from this base group. As a result, I identified a group of students who were also attending maths and social science at the same level. But this does not mean that the group identified so were attending both classes; some were attending maths and not the social science class or vice versa.

In the first two months, my observation was haphazard, but the focus was always on the interaction between the two group. Later I structured my observation to focus on specific interactions: student-student interactions in and outside the class, student-teacher interaction, teacher-student interaction. My intentions in the beginning (August-December) was to map a pattern of interaction in and outside the classroom focusing on: who initiates the interactions, and who does not, in what context, and what is the purpose of the interaction. In January-February, I began thinking about eliciting students' perception of the observed nature of the interaction, which was one the main issues I raised in the interviews with the actors. It was not, however, until I began reading and re-reading the interview material that I decided to focus on the talk about how the participants thematised the "other". In other words, the typifications in operation in the process of othering the "other". A typical field note for my research, prior to reconstruction looked like this:

The folk high school:

> Came to the class 5 minutes late, the class in session. Subject: History. Teacher: Lasse. Topic: Swedish history. No changes in the seating arrangements. Ali is absent today. Wonder what happened to him. Not seen him for a couple of weeks. The teacher: "Any questions." The class silent. "Then lets continue with the group work." The students sit in groups. Claudia works with her usual companion. The work groupings conform to the groups. John goes out. The teacher goes around to the different groups. Nina: "I do not understand anything." The teacher: "What don't you understand? Read, try to get the main facts to present to the rest of the class?" Tim comes back after two or so minutes and sits with Anette. Teacher goes out. Most of the students working with the text. Per and Tim show disinterest, doing something else. Tim drawing on a paper, Per and his friend pretending to work. Teacher comes back. Interesting although students supposed to work as a group most students work individually, asking each other questions occasionally, but everyone making their own notes. Teacher: "Let's take a five-minute break."

This text was later reconstructed, detailing the seating arrangements, the pattern of interaction or lack of interaction. In the above case, the focus was on the teacher-student interaction in the class.

The interviews

The data for reconstructing the background and experiences of the students in the two schools were elicited through interviews and to a limited extent through the use of a questionnaire. According to Kvale (1996), the interviewer picks the situation, the topic of the dialogue and controls the direction of interview through further questions. Although the interviewer initiates the interaction, the dialogue is interrelational as both the interviewer and the interviewed impact what is said and what is not. Kvale stresses:

> The knowledge created by the interview is inter-relational ... the data obtained are neither objective nor subjective, but intersubjective (ibid., p. 45).

The knowledge thus produced is not only inter-subjective, it is also specific to a particular context – the school life of adult students in Komvux and a folk high school. So, this study is a mutual construction, or fusion, of horizons. In the process, the interviewer and the interviewees bring their self into the process of the interview.

In each of the research setting, 20 students were randomly sampled to be interviewed. Before I get into how the interviewees were chosen, it is essential to comment on the sex distribution of the interviewed students. The majority of the students interviewed in both settings were women. In the folk high school, it is the specific policy of the school, unlike Komvux, to recruit low educated women. While in Komvux, the priority is low-educated adults in the municipality irrespective of sex or ethnicity. In fact, according to the head teacher, the day folk high was established as a result of the closure of a major factory in the municipality, which employed many women. Traditionally the school has always targeted women and more recently "immigrants" in the municipality.

Twenty students in Komvux were randomly selected using the English class as the base group (in this group, five students attended maths, and the social science classes at this level). The group was divided into two groups of students, Swedish and non-Swedish students or immigrants. From each group, 10 students were randomly chosen. The purpose of dividing the students in Komvux into immigrant and native students was to get a cultural

representation of the student body in the three classes that reflect the diversity of the two schools. In addition, as noted earlier, the purpose was to get a variety of data and to avoid focusing on a cultural or ethnic group, and hopefully avoid a discourse of difference that is common in ethnic and immigrant studies which entrenches the "Us" and "Them" understanding of the socio-cultural diversity of the Swedish society.

A total of about 33 students, 7 teachers in both schools, the director of Komvux and the head teacher in the folk high school were interviewed. Two students in the folk high school declined to be interviewed: a native student and an immigrant. One student, an immigrant, dropped out of the school and I could not get in touch with him. The rest of the students were, however interviewed. In Komvux three declined to be interviewed. Two did not categorically say no, but despite the fact that I arranged several times to interview them, they never turned up. In Komvux, three of the students declined to be interviewed; one was a Swedish student and two were immigrants. The reason they all gave was that they did not have time.

The majority of the Swedish students and the immigrants came from a similar social background, a working class background. One can argue that even though they came from a similar social background, they are, in fact, products of different socio-cultural contexts, and their experience of the system would be different. One can also argue that although they differ in that regard they are exposed to an educational system that is a product of a specific culture, a middle class culture. But because immigrants are defined as different in relation to the "Swede", they may be subjected to additional bias, and excluded from the common good.

The interviews were open-ended and focused not only on the students' educational and social cultural background, and motives for going back to school, but also on their experiences in participating in the school and the multicultural nature of the two schools. The students' experience of the school emphasised teacher-student interaction in the class, student-student interaction in and outside the class, future plans and goals, and their social situation. All the interviews were conducted in the two schools and all except one were taped. In the teachers' and students' answers, I allowed them a lot of latitude. But at the same time, I exercised a degree of control. Whenever I noticed during the interview that the students and teachers were wandering into areas that were irrelevant, I tended to listen for moment and then refocused them either by changing the

topic or asking them to develop an issue they raised during the interview.

The interpretation of the material

It is essential to emphasise that the data collected were intersubjectively constructed. That is, I was an active participant in the constructions that emerged. I initiated the interaction, and the actors reacted to my questions. On top of that, the constructions that emerged in the interview situation are discussed, and theorised using literature that has a common point of departure social constructionism. Consequently, one can say the interpretations and the discussions are a process of double constructions, in which the actors in the field might or might not recognise or agree with the final product. In addition, my subject position, particularly my identity as an immigrant, influenced my interpretations, emphasising the subjective situation of immigrant students' voices in relation to the native students (see my reflections at the end of every chapter).

It is, however, important to point out that the focus of the interpretation are categories and concepts that the involved actors (including me) use to other each other in the multicultural social discourse. Consequently, in the interpretation of the labelling practices, I can only participate in the language and meanings (for example, the concepts and categories) in operation in the discourse. Clarke and Cochrane (1998) write:

> This perspective (social constructionism – my bracket) starts by emphasizing one essential feature of human societies - the role of language. In human societies action is preceded by understanding and intention. We intend our action to have a meaningful outcome. Our actions convey messages to other members of society (p. 26).

The discourse shapes what can and cannot be said. For example, in the multicultural discourse in Sweden one can only work within the discourse of multiculturalism, and the labels or typifications used in this discourse. An important aspect of the discourse, as pointed out below, is the categories people use to make sense of others in the multicultural world they live in. Poewe writes:

> Identification, labelling, or defining are discourse - dependent, but the discourse may be local, foreign, or about to be invented. Because these phenomena are experienced ... (1996, p. 187).

Werbner in addition, writes that all collective typifications essentialise and the discursive constructions of collectives are essentialistic:

> Since any objectification of a group or collectivity necessarily implies a continued unity in time and space, and a measure of integration, it would seem to follow that all forms of objectifications essentialise. In seeking a way out of this apparent aporia, Dominguez suggests that ethnographic writings should focus not on groups but on the process of objectification itself: the way collectivities describe, re-describe and argue over who they are (1997, p. 229).

The intention here is not to show the limitations of language, or its inadequacy, but to stress the fact that essentialising a collective have real consequences. The categories are relational or are indications of relations in the social schema of relations in a particular society. These categories are imbedded in, and are important aspects of, the discourse and rhetoric of multiculturalism. The acts of the actors in this context are, or can be, linked to the discourse and rhetoric of multiculturalism in a specific context.

> The issue is not, we need to remember, merely discursive, linguistic paradox disclosing the limits of language. Policy decisions, state funded allocations, racial murders, ethnic cleansing, anti-racist struggles, nationalists conflicts or revival, even genocide, follow on essentialist constructions of unitary, organic cultural collectives (ibid., p. 229).

Labelling collectives and individuals as different or same is an act of power, in the sense that it defines for people what difference(s) are perceived as important by the group that defines. Therefore, instead of focusing on only describing the pattern of interactions observed in the field, I decided as pointed out above, to go one more step to understand the actors' typifications or naming of the other, or the frame of references the actors use in relating to each other in the multicultural context of the two schools.

I use the word problematisation here, instead of deconstructionism, simply because I cannot claim to utilise fully the deconstructionist strategies in the analysis of the data. In the analysis, I used the following three steps of the deconstructionist strategy:

a) Dismantling a dichotomy, exposing its false distinction (for example, "immigrant" – "Swede" distinction)

b) Examining silences – What is not said (noting who speaks or what is said or excluded (for example, in the social construction of the "other")

c) Attending to disruptions and contradiction, places where the text fails to make sense (for example, contradictions in scripting the boundaries between the natives and the "other")

My choice to focus on the observed event noted above and subsequently the concepts and categories (the lack of interaction between the native and non-native students) early on can be criticised, i.e. it might have blinded me from focusing on issues that may be perceived as more important. But I strongly believe that it is essential to interrogate the common sense concepts and knowledge that individuals use to make sense of their world. Because not only are policy decisions made as a consequence of our understanding of social relations in our world and the way we talk about it, but also other social acts, both positive and negative, tend to flow from naming practices used to define the "other" as different or "abnormal".

So far I have not concretely described how I analysed and interpreted the data in the study. In qualitative studies one seeks patterns in the material collected. In the case of this study the pattern elicited was not intended to elicit categories. Instead the categories used were obtained from the talk itself. The focus was not to identify the categories per se but the content of the categories the actors used in making sense of the multicultural nature of their reality in the two schools investigated and the Swedish society in general, but also in relating to the "other".

The analysis and interpretation process started with transcribing the interviews. In order to familiarise myself with the material I read the material a number of times. Hammersley and Atkinson (1983) emphasise that the first step in the process of analysing qualitative data is to read the data thoroughly and carefully and this cannot be achieved through a single reading of the data. According to them:

> At this stage the aim is to use the data to think with. One looks to see whether any interesting patterns can be identified; whether anything stands out as surprising or puzzling; how the data relate to what one might have expected on the basis of common sense knowledge, official accounts or previous theories, and whether there are any apparent inconsistencies or contradictions among the views among the different groups of individuals or between people's expressed beliefs or attitudes

> and what they do. Such features and patterns may already have been noted in previous field notes and analytical memos, perhaps even along with some ideas about how they might be explained (p. 179).

The structuring and analysis of the data was achieved through interrogating the material using the following questions:

a) What categories and concepts do the actors use to define the "other" as different? The dichotomy(ies) in the talk.

b) What do they mean when they construct the "other" using the concepts and categories identified in (a)? The focus in this stage of the analysis is not the categories or concept per se but the content of the categories or the concept.

c) The relation between the categories and concepts used by the actors. Focusing on the inconsistencies and contradictions in the use of the categories and concepts by the actors. What is said and not said, i.e. the negations.

(d) The categories and concepts the actors use and what they mean are then interrogated using theories that have one common root – social constructionism.

Four copies of the interview material were made and numbered in relation to the above issues. Whenever a category or concept was used to differentiate the native from the "other" or vice versa, the text was marked, without at this point thinking about the content of the statement. This was followed by steps (b), (c) and (d). The third step involved reading the different parts in relation to each other, in order to elicit a pattern, but also contradictions, and inconsistencies in the actors talk. This step entailed describing the talk, emphasising the content of the categories the actors operate with, and discussing the concepts using literature in the area. Consequently, the manner in which the text of this study is structured and the interpretations focuses on the inconsistencies and disruptions in the talk.

The point of this work, its usefulness and the focus of the interpretation (the subaltern emphasised in it) is to show the complexity of multicultural social situation, and the multiplicity of identities and experiences in the multicultural social relations; in addition to argue against a simplistic notion of the "other" that is central in the construction of the "other". In other words to problematise the language game, hopefully opening a dialogue or discourse of multiculturalism which emphasises the inclusion of the "other", instead of

excluding the "other" from social and common good. This will be hopefully achieved by critically examining the common sense labels, used to discursively construct the "other" as different.

Ethical considerations

In ethnographic studies, ethical consideration is particularly important, because the research strategy involves working closely with a group of people in a specific context for a relatively long time. In the process one might get information that might infringe on the integrity of individuals, or the source of information can be identified, leading to possible negative consequence for the individuals. Therefore, the quest for knowledge should strike a balance between the need to know and respect for the actors in the field. At the same time, anonymity of individuals might, on the other hand, make it difficult for the researcher to present his study.

In this study I have taken a number of measures to make it difficult for the reader to identify the context of the study. I have not identified the location of the study. The names of the schools and the actors have been changed. In one case I even changed the sex of one actor. But it is possible for the actors to identify themselves and others in this study. In addition from the start of the project the actors were informed of the purpose of the study and were given the choice to participate or not. One teacher decided not to participate in the study, and a number of students did not want to be interviewed, and I respected their choice. In addition, I decided not to use certain comments or statements, particularly by the students, because I felt that they had little relevance, but more importantly that they might infringe on the integrity of individual actors in the field.

The issue of validity

Validity, or issues around validity, are the key issue in the qualitative and quantitative debate. In this brief presentation it is impossible to present an exhaustive treatise on validity and reliability in quantitative and qualitative research traditions. However, I will highlight certain aspects of this debate in relation to my study.

It is important, however, to point out that the debate is not only between the two traditions, but there are also different positions vis-à-vis validity within the qualitative research tradition. The idea in

quantitative studies is well defined and there are methods or procedure to determine the degree of validity and reliability in such studies. But in qualitative studies, the concept is contested. According to Roos, qualitative researchers have dealt with the problem of validity in two different ways. A group led by researchers such as Denzin (1970), Patton (1980), Goetz and LeCompte (1984) have created validity based on traditional positivist criteria, whereas the second group lead by Guba and Lincoln (1982, 1989), Hammersley (1992), Kirk and Miller (1986), Kvale (1989c), and Mishler (1990) have attempted to develop alternative criteria.

Kvale (1997), for example, identified three criteria for determining validity in qualitative studies: validity as quality of craftsmanship, communicative validity, and pragmatic validity. Validity as quality of craftsmanship means the ability of the researcher to check, question and to theorise. The focus of communicative validity is on how the study meets the criteria established (intersubjective consensus) by a research community, i.e. what the community constitutes as an acceptable research praxis and product in a research tradition. In other words are the data, analysis, and arguments presented in the study capable of surviving critical examination by the scientific community? Pragmatic validity deals with the question and importance of the consequences and usefulness of qualitative studies for practitioners.

Larsson's criteria (1993), on the other hand, focus on evaluating the quality of the result of qualitative studies. Some of his criteria are similar to Kvale's (1997) communicative validity and pragmatic validity criteria. Larsson, in addition, identifies the criteria empirical anchorage. It focuses on the relation between reality and interpretation. This according to Larsson is a common criterion in nearly all research paradigms. Consistency criteria is one of the major criteria in the hermeneutic tradition. In this tradition, interpretation is constructed through reading parts of the text in relation to the whole. Finally, heuristic criteria/value in qualitative studies simply means constructing new knowledge as a result of the description of a phenomenon itself – the result is a new way to construct a reality or perceive a phenomenon in a new shade.

These criteria, I hope, permeate the analysis and discussions in this study since the focus of this study is labelling and common sense knowledge used by the actors to construct the multicultural nature and realities of different collectivities in the Swedish society today. By critically examining these categories, I hope to present a picture of a reality that is common, not only in this individual case study, but can be related to other cases. In the process I hope to con-

vince the readers of the complex nature of people's constructions of their realities, and that these (realities) are not simply due to their perceived primary identities. In this context, it is important to reiterate that the intention of this study has not been to examine how the educational activities in the schools studied (context) affect the actors' perception of who they are, but to describe and understand how the actors perceive themselves and the "others" as the same or different and its possible consequences on how they define and construct their realities in relation to the school, and in their interactions with each other. Through my interpretation of my interviews and observation of the actors, I have hopefully detected (in the actors' constructions of their reality in the two contexts studied) some common frames of reference that shape or affect the actors' action in the two contexts studied

It is essential to point out that these criteria are intertwined and as Larsson (1993) notes, they can be contradictory or pull the researcher in different directions. Consequently they cannot, and should not, be used as a check list for evaluating a qualitative study. However, many researchers in this tradition rarely problematise this concept but assume that validity in qualitative research is generally achieved by the closeness of the process itself to the object of study. Roos (1994) in this discussion writes:

> If reliability is discussed in qualitative research, the discussion is mainly about validity and rarely about reliability ... the emphasis on validity is probably based on the fact that some see validity as guaranteed in qualitative research by the close study of the phenomenon in its natural context (p. 73).

But, according to Roos, closeness is not without its problems. There is a danger of "going native" or overidentification with a group of actors in the field, hence compromising the validity of the research. Earlier I noted the dilemma I faced in my relation with the non-native student and my actions. In my interaction with these I was conscious of my identity, but also of overidentifying myself with them, so that I was on my guard not to go "native". Going "native" is a critique of the idea of closeness as a guarantee of validity in qualitative research.

Triangulation is one of the strategies which ethnographic researchers use to guarantee internal validity. Triangulation simply means the use of different types or sources of data and theories to shed light on the object of the study, event or process. Denzin (1970) identified four types of triangulation – data, methodological, and theoretical triangulation. In this study I used triangulation of data,

i.e. data collected through the following methods: participant observation, interviews, and to a limited extent, document analysis and questionnaire.

In this study, I did not conduct a respondent validation. Respondent validation, according to Roos (1994), is sometimes regarded as a form of triangulation. I chose not to do this because: a) there were time limitations, b) more importantly, the idea of respondent validation or member check is controversial. Ball (1983), in his critique of this strategy, argues that the actors in the field would have difficulty accessing the data as a consequence of the data having changed character; it has undergone organisation, categorisation and interpretation. But he also points out that the researcher can face a dilemma if the respondents reject the description of the researcher, whose description should be adopted etc.

This problem, I believe, could not compromise seriously the object of the study. The typing categories the actors were using to define the other were constant irrespective of the method of collecting the data or the source. In other words, the communal understanding and categories used in this context were similar. All the actors, irrespective of their origin, used the category "immigrant", and all the natives I interviewed perceived some immigrants as culturally different. Therefore member check would not have produced anything new. On a number of occasions I presented the study to colleagues in and outside my institution, mainly in the form of seminars. In addition, I had a continuous dialogue with fellow research students, and others during the different phases of the research process. This community scrutiny, as noted earlier, is an important validity criterion in qualitative studies.

Reflexivity

The idea of common sense versus science, the researcher and the researched, according to Hammersley and Atkinson (1983), is at the heart of both positivism and naturalism. They write:

> It is this that leads to their joint obsession with eliminating the effects of the researcher on the data. For one, the solution is the standardization of research procedures; for the other it is direct experience of the social world, extreme form the requirement that ethnographers surrender themselves to the cultures they wish to study (p. 14).

These positions, according to them, are based on the assumption that it is possible to extract a body of data without the researcher contaminating the data by either turning themselves into automatons or "making them neutral vessels of cultural experience" (ibid., p.14). They suggest that these problems can be resolved through acknowledging the reflexive nature of social research, i.e. the researcher and the researched are partners. They argue that this: "... is not a matter of methodological commitment, it is an existential fact" (ibid., p. 15).

Entering the field to undertake a study is not a problem. But the most difficult aspect of fieldwork is cultivating close contact with the actors in the field. In the fieldwork, researchers are both participators and observers (a stranger) at the same time. Consequently, they are constantly forced to reflect on their relation with actors in the field.

In the fieldwork I felt, or in fact was, a "stranger" or the "other" in every sense of the word. I was, one can say, overwhelmed by my identity – as an immigrant and researcher. My status as an immigrant in the context was very obvious, due to the colour of my skin and non-Swedish accent etc. There was very little I could do about that but to minimise its impact, through emphasising whenever possible my identity as a researcher. I accomplished this using a number of strategies: a) in presenting myself to the actors I emphasised my research role, with the help of the teachers and whenever possible individually with the students, b) not identifying myself with any group or actors in the field, c) being aware or reading students' reactions to my presence in the class, but particularly outside the class. A good example of the "otherness" of the researcher, according to Ehn and Klein (1994), is Paul Dumont's experience:

> Panare live in small groups spread over a large area as hunters, collectors, and farmers ... For a long time he was treated in a strange way, the women did not talk to him, and the men were worried that he would take one of their women (p. 16).

The way he looked, his ethnicity, was a problem. Panare had no notion that people like Dumont existed. Until they established a form of working identity, they were suspicious of him and kept their distance. Likewise I perceived my ethnicity as a limitation in my interaction with the natives in particular. It was, I believe, rare for them to see or interact with people of colour in my role

In the first two months, I noticed on a couple occasions that the students tended to stop talking and disperse after politely greeting me, or change the subject, making a joke at my expense saying

something like this: "Here comes the researcher." It was not easy to deal with the suspicion of the native students. I wondered whether it was my identity as an immigrant that was the problem, or were they just suspicious of me the researcher, or both. I then decided to ask two students if I could interview them in the future without specifying a date. None of them gave a direct yes or no. Then I decided it was not the right moment to conduct the interview. I had to penetrate this wall of suspicion separating me from the students, particularly, the native students.

I changed my tactics. Instead of waiting for the students to come me, I decided to actively interact with a couple of students whom I observed were respected by the majority of the students in the class, and particularly by Group One students (described in chapter 5). These two students, one can say, facilitated my "entrance" in the field. I have to emphasise that this does not mean that I was welcomed with open arms, but my presence and intrusion was tolerated by the majority of the students.

In Komvux I adopted a similar strategy, although I did not need it, because the native students were not as suspicious as in the folk high school. This does not mean that the students in Komvux were open or easy to interact with. They rarely interacted with each other in and outside the class as a group like the students in the folk high school, nor did they perceive themselves as a class. In other words they were less susceptible to, or concerned with, what their fellow students might think if they allowed me to interview them.

Cultivating contacts with the non-native students or immigrants was not a problem. The problem, however, was how to keep my distance from them or avoid overidentifying myself with them at the expense of the other participants in the school. One of the strategies I used was to sit alone in the class, whenever possible, to mark my neutrality. The major problem, however, was during the formal or informal interview and conversations with the students. I was frustrated and saddened at times by the negative manner in which they perceived their reality – the majority saw no hope in the future.

What was even disheartening was that they saw themselves as victims, and blamed the native students and the Swedes for their situation. The dominating perspective among the non-native students was that: "It is because of the natives that I am in this situation, that I do not have a job, that I will not have a job in the future, that my past educational and professional career is not acknowledged." I had a lot difficulty in dealing with the self pity, but at the same time I did not want to come across as insensitive to them. Their stories and concern did impact me, and this is apparent

in my analysis. I took sides. I chose to focus on the talk that constructed them as different, the root cause of their concern, and problematise the talk, or the manner in which the natives other the non-natives, hopefully showing the oppressive nature of categories and typifications the dominant group uses.

Similarly, I was also mystified by the simplistic notion of the "other" as different which the native actors operated with. Particularly mystifying was the idea that the "other" is culturally different and in the process homogenised as a very diverse group on one criterion. They are excluded on that basis alone, but also explicitly and implicitly their action, behaviour, attitude etc. are attributed to their "culture". I suddenly found myself in the interview in a position where actors were telling me that I was essentially different, in the process naturalising my difference in relation to them. At that specific moment the actors engage me not as an immigrant, which I am, but emphasise my identity as a researcher and talk to me in that capacity. This dual role in which the actors perceived me was problematic. I was always forced to reflect on my action but also on the action of the actors. For example, were they telling me what I wanted to hear because I am an immigrant? What does it mean when they pause in the interview, or will not answer my question or reply to my question with: "I do not know." But this problem, I believe, is not unique to my situation, or this particular study, but is a common problem in interview situations.

Chapter 4

The context of the study: Introduction: a general description of adult education in Sweden

Adult education in Sweden is a very diverse social phenomenon. In this brief presentation, I cannot adequately describe and do justice to the system. I have opted instead to describe, in very general terms, the two systems of adult education: the folk high school and the municipal adult education system (Komvux) and to describe in detail the two schools that I studied. This is partly due to the nature of context of the study itself. Despite the fact the folk high schools share some common characteristics, they are very diverse in many aspects, unlike Komvux. But even within Komvux (as a system) there are local variations, or profiles, that are geared to meet the local conditions and needs.

The folk high school

The folk high school is a school for adults that was established in the mid-19th century to raise national consciousness and strengthen civic education among the general population in the Nordic countries. The idea of folk high school was advocated and realised by N.F.S Grundtvig (1783-1872) in Denmark. In 1844, the first folk high school was established in Denmark, in 1864 in Norway and in 1868 and 1889 in Sweden and Finland, respectively. Grundtvig did not develop a detailed programme for the system, but a vision of how such a system could promote the spiritual emancipation and social development of rural population. His pedagogical concept for the system was based on the idea of "the living word". This meant in practice teacher-led lecturing and dialogue with the students. The main subjects for the school according to the Grundtvigian model are National history, social life, poetry, and songs.

When the folk high schools were first established in Sweden, they were initially run by non-governmental institutions, mainly by local associations, for the inhabitants of the local community(ies). Later, the county councils established and operated their own folk high schools. These schools targeted or recruited students from the county councils. However, in the first decade of the 20th century,

social movements such as the workers' movement etc., opened their own folk high schools, and recruited students from the whole country. Currently, nearly all social movements run their own folk high schools. In the academic year 1994/95, there were about 136 folk high schools in Sweden, catering for about 200,000 students full-time, part- time or short time

The folk high schools have traditionally been and still are to a large extent boarding schools. This was seen as an important aspect of the educational environment as it provided the students with the space to develop a feeling of community and personal development. The activities of folk high schools are said to be founded on the belief that each individual is unique, and in the dialogue between the actors in the school, each individual is capable of offering unique perspectives and life experiences. This democratic view permeates the activities of the folk high school system in particular. But this characteristic is not, however, unique to the folk high school, but it is a common rhetorics of the Swedish educational system in general.

Despite the fact that folk high schools have different ideological profiles and educational activities, they have certain common characteristics: (1) the schools are free to develop not only their own educational programmes, but also the content of the programmes, i.e. there is no national curriculum for the system. (2) The schools are exempted from tests and grades in the traditional sense. (3) They have the freedom to target any social group, and employ any teacher they want. Finally, (4) the students are expected to participate and influence the method, content and organisation of their learning situation.

The manner in which the system is organised and structured allows inputs from different actors in the school. In fact the system is run by different committees at different levels, with different mandates, and the actors in the system are all represented in the different committees, such as the school board, the teachers' committee etc. (SOU 1989:97). In brief, the uniqueness of the system can be summarised and described in the following manner:

> Dialogue, participant-led teaching, democratic training, absence of grades, and the strong sense of social relations between students and teachers is what might be characterised as the essence of "folk high schoolness", and which defines the uniqueness of this school form (ibid., p. 27).

The folk high school system has a very wide catalogue of courses, which vary substantially in length. Students can enrol in the school

for one year or three years. The system even organises short courses that last for a day or two, depending upon the needs of the students and their educational background. These courses cover a wide area of subjects, but the following are the core subjects: languages, social science, and science. In addition, they offer a substantial variety of special courses, such as handicrafts, drama, music etc. However, for the school to get financial assistance from the state, it has to organise course(s) that cover a minimum of 30 weeks with a minimum of 20 students. The folk high school is not obligatory. Anyone can participate or be admitted to the system irrespective of their educational background and age as long as they are 18 years old. In other words, there is no upper age limit.

Municipal adult education

The municipal adult education system (commonly known as Komvux) was created in the late 60s, and the educational programme in Komvux is now organised on three levels: the first level provides students with an education corresponding to the comprehensive school (1-9). The second level is equivalent to upper secondary education. The third level is complementary courses. The school also provides courses commissioned by the municipality and other organisations, private or public, for their workers. This system, also, includes Särvux (adult education for mentally handicapped), and SFI (Swedish for immigrants).

The priority of the school is adult students who lack basic educational competency. Consequently, the system caters for adult students who want to improve on their past education in order to change their situation in the labour market or qualify for higher education. The programmes in the school can, therefore, lead to a defined competency, but it can also provide courses that do not necessarily lead to a particular competency. The courses and the programmes in Komvux are flexible. For example, students can take mathematics at the gymnasium level and English at a level corresponding to comprehensive primary education. Students can choose to study full-time or part-time, day or evening, or a combination of evening and day, depending upon their situation. It is important to point out that the folk high school as a system is increasingly becoming like Komvux. This trend is apparent in a number of ways. For example, the students are tested, and streamed on the basis of their ability and their educational background. In addition, the folk

high schools like Komvux are increasingly targeting and organising courses for the unemployed.

The research setting

The municipal adult education centre and the folk high school are located in a relatively large town in the Swedish context, with a population of about 100,000. Both schools are located in the main street of the town. In the same street, there are also a number of schools other than the two schools. Within a short distance of this cluster of schools are the city library, the city concert hall and the museum. Both schools are housed in relatively old buildings. Komvux is located in a large L-shaped building, while the day folk high school is in a one storey house. Both buildings were undergoing renovations, when I started my fieldwork

The day folk high school

The folk high school was established in the early 1930s. Initially, it was a boarding school only. The school is currently composed of three units, relatively independent from each other, and located in different parts of the town. All these three units have different educational profiles. This study was conducted at the day folk high school. It was established in the late 70s, and located in the centre of the town

The ground floor of the folk high schools consists of a number of classes, an office for the student guidance counsellor, the school's assembly hall, and a student kitchen. As one enters or leaves the building, one cannot avoid looking at the bulletin board which is strategically placed on the ground floor, opposite the staircase and near the main door. On this board, the school and classes post planned activities, but also important cultural, political and social activities that are planned or ongoing in the town

The first floor also consists of a number of classrooms, a student kitchen, teachers' offices, the office of the school secretary, the staff room, the head teacher's office and a storeroom, which also contains a photocopier and a computer room. On the wall outside the secretary's office, there is also an announcement board, which is mainly used by the secretary to post telephone messages for the students. The walls of the school are decorated with pieces of art borrowed from the town museum, posters, and pictures.

One of the things that caught my attention was the office of the head teacher. It is a small corridor sandwiched between the relatively large office of the school secretary and the staffroom. During my fieldwork in the school, the head teacher rarely sat in his office, unless he was making a phonecall or writing, which was not often. He was either in a class teaching or in the staffroom during the class breaks like any other teacher in the school.

On any given day there are about 110 students and teachers in this single-storey building. In this confined space, the students and teachers are always in contact, bumping into each other in the corridors, standing in and around the school in small groups during break time. One student expressed his feeling about the school in the following manner: "In this building there is nowhere you can sit alone by yourself."

In the early stages, the founding fathers defined the profile of the school as a school for mature students, interested in studying and willing to work: in brief an elite. The goal of the school then was to train educational leaders and to assure study circles with an educated teaching force. Since its earliest days, the school has been closely associated (one of the founding organisations) with a study association. At the same time, the school was viewed as a forum for free debate, and not a school committed to a particular political ideology or religion. These built-in contradictions still characterise the aims and profile of the school to the present day.

> We view "bildning "(bildung, or education) as a never-ending and free process. It has its point of departure in the participants' own experiences and knowledge. From these, new knowledge is built up and translated into practice, which provides a strong foundation for further education and widening one's own consciousness.

In addition, the action plan of the school states that, ideologically, it is committed to the basic values of the workers' movement; solidarity, equality and democracy. Therefore, one can question whether the school is a free forum with respect to incorporating other values in the society. The priority of the school has also changed from recruiting young and motivated adult students to targeting middle-aged and poorly educated men, women and immigrants in the municipality. All these groups are typified as disadvantaged groups.

> In order to narrow the educational gaps in society, the folk high school should prioritise people who are educationally, socially, and culturally disadvantaged. This means recruiting people

> with little or no education, immigrants, handicapped, and other disadvantaged groups.

"Immigrants" in the above policy or praxis are classified as a socially and culturally disadvantaged group. This is interesting in the sense that this group (defined as "immigrants") includes people with disability, illiterates, low educated, but also other categories as noted also by Erikson and Jonsson, below. In the above policy statement, however, they are defined as a homogeneous group:

> ... Immigrants are a very heterogeneous group with a number of different characteristics: from intellectuals that fled to Sweden from Hungary and Czechoslovakia to poor farmers from Greece and Turkey with rudimentary education. Immigrants, in addition, differ in terms of their language, culture, religion, etc. (1995, p. 118).

The school, like Komvux is composed of students from diverse ethnic groups, but it is not as diverse as Komvux. This is partly due to the size of the school (about 100 students are enrolled in the day folk high school) and partly due to the policy of the school which limits the number of "immigrant" students to 30% of the total number of students in the school. The majority of "immigrant" students in the two school are found in the Swedish for Immigrants language programme (SFI). According to the head teacher, most of these students are referred to the school by the immigration office and the social welfare service. In the basic adult education programme, there were 3 immigrant students – one male and two females from Iran, Turkey and Chile. These students have lived in Sweden and in the municipality for more than five years. The school was recommended to the majority of the students interviewed by friends that either have studied in the school or still students in the school. But, as noted above, the majority of "immigrant" students were at the SFI, and were referred to the school by immigration office. The 30% limit vis-à-vis the recruitment of non-native students is not a written policy of the school, but is a praxis, or a rule of thumb.

> One third I think, one always tried to recruit students from different cultures, immigrants, but, on the other hand, they should not be many. Last spring, when I was responsible for the basic education programme, there were many who applied but we limited the number (of immigrants) to one third of the total number of the students in the school. Because from our experiences, their Swedish language is poor, so it is difficult. The language of instruction is Swedish after all. Why we said so

> was probably because we were striving to maintain the majority culture. No, I do not really remember how we motivated the praxis. We meant that immigrants who enrol in the basic education ought to be able to feel that the school is Swedish. They come here to socialise with the Swedes, and talk Swedish. Consequently, Swedes have to be the majority group in relation to the immigrants and Swedishness has to characterise the whole school. (Teacher [F])

In explaining the praxis, the teacher above raises a number of pedagogical issues: one is the communicative pedagogical aspect of education, or interaction, that is central in the educational tradition of folk high schools. Knowledge in this tradition is said to arise, or is perceived to be constructed, through dialogue and encounters. Consequently, language is central in this pedagogical tradition and the poor Swedish skills on the part of immigrants are viewed as an obstacle. In other words, the poor language ability of immigrants makes it difficult for them to actively participate in the educational activities of the school.

By minimising the number of immigrants in the school, (as is apparent in her comment) the teachers and the school hope to create an environment which supports and provides "immigrants with the space to practice their Swedish." Implicit in this assumption is the notion that immigrants lack the social networking which includes the "native", and this negatively impacts their language development in Swedish. Furthermore, the praxis assumes that (immigrants and Swedes) these students would automatically interact and socialise with one another without some form of intervention by the teacher(s) or the school.

In addition, implicit in the above comment is also an understanding that immigrants are guest students (guest worker attitude). As guests it is important for immigrants to learn the Swedish "culture" and language. Therefore, it is essential to limit their number in the school. In other words, participation is conditioned by the attitude that immigrants have intruded into our space and it is their duty to adapt to our ways, not us to their ways. Consequently, the praxis as noted above has, in the final analysis, an assimilationist project – the logic of the praxis, hence, is that it is easier to assimilate a small number of immigrants than a large number. However, interaction or integration, as is apparent in chapters 5 and 6, is not determined solely by language ability. What is interesting in this context is, however, the praxis of promoting immigrants to integrated classes without a proper or satisfactory language ability to participate

meaningful in the class and school activities. This practice handicaps these students in mixed-class situations.

The educational programmes

The academic year of the school starts in August of every year and ends in May. The long courses are about 34 weeks long, while the short courses are about 16 weeks long. The long courses can be generally divided into two groups: a) general courses (allmän kurs) and b) complementary courses (påbyggnadskurs), with different orientations, such as humanistic or environmental orientation etc. However, the day and the boarding units have slightly different profiles. For example, in the day folk high school, the courses have a social and international orientation, while in the boarding unit the courses are culturally and environmentally oriented.

In the action programme of the school, it is emphasised that the school activities ought to increase students' knowledge and understanding of people and other cultures (internationalisation) in Europe and the third world. The cultural and international profile of the school's work has been a characteristic of the school since its establishment. This commitment to culture and international solidarity is still a strong element in the activities and curriculum of the school.

It is, however, important to point out that although the cultural element of the school activity is more visible in the boarding school in terms of courses it provides, cultural activities in the day folk high school are also an important part of its educational activities. In the 1994/95 academic year, for example, the students attended a number of plays in and outside the school by professional actors and the school's amateur theatrical group. They also attended free lunch concerts, a classical music programme organised by the town's symphony orchestra. Apart from these cultural programmes, the school in the same period invited a number of authors and lecturers to talk about their books or a special theme. At no time during my field studies did I see literary works, music, or experiences of non-natives presented to the students, despite the multicultural nature or character of the school.

The long courses are intended to provide the students with general civic education (allmän medborgerlig bildning) and qualifications (behörighetsgivande) for further education. But according to the head teacher, different types of long courses can be organised, if they fit the profile and goals of the school. The school also provides SFI courses (Swedish for immigrants). The purpose of these courses

is to orient or provide immigrants with basic knowledge of Swedish society and at the same time teach Swedish as a second language. In working with immigrants, in general, the action plan of the school emphasises the importance of, and respect for, different cultures and traditions.

Before the students are placed in any programmes, they are interviewed by the teachers responsible. Their placement in a programme generally depends on the students' past educational background. Immigrants who do not have documents or proof of past educational careers take a diagnostic test in the subjects they want to study.

> We talk to the student. The basic adult education programme, there are always new people, we look at their grades, and ask them what they want to study ... Those who do not have grades, take a test there ... we look at whether they can formulate themselves in Swedish. (The head teacher [F])

The focus of this programme (the SFI) is to provide immigrants with language skills in Swedish to pursue a career or further education.

It is evident in the above description of the folk high school that the school has yet to develop a coherent policy in relating to the multicultural nature of its students body or clients. It is also apparent that the school urges the actors in the school to take into account the "cultures" of the immigrant in the school. But this concern is not manifested in its activities or organisation. Apart from the issues noted above, for example, the ethnocentric nature of its cultural programmes and activities is a good example of the lack of policy in the area. On top of that with the exception of one teacher, the rest of the teaching and support staff in the school are natives or Swedes.

The students in the folk high school

The majority of the students in the basic education programme and the school are women in their mid 30s and early 40s. This can be partly explained by the policy of the school. As I pointed out earlier, the school targets low educated students, particularly women, which explains the domination of women in the school. Nearly 50% of the students did not know the educational background of their parents. With the exception of Tim and Lena all the students in the basic education programme came from working class background.

In addition, with the exception of Ali, Tom, Anette, and Anna, the rest of the students had a relatively long working career. From the interview, however, it was evident that nearly all the students in

this programme (I interviewed all the students, with the exception of three students who refused to be interviewed) came from a working class background, irrespective of their culture, race or ethnicity. However, there are subtle differences between the native and non-native. Among all the non-natives the father was the sole breadwinner in the family, while the mothers were not only illiterate, but stayed at home and took care of the family.

Komvux

The municipal adult education centre in the municipality is housed in an L-shaped two-storey building. One of the wings was undergoing renovation and was closed until the last months of my field work. All the administrative offices were located on the first floor of the main building and were interconnected. That is, the staff could go from one office to another from their common room to all the administrative offices without using the corridor. The office of the director is large, about the size of a classroom, with a large desk in the middle, while the assistant directors (for the basic and secondary education programme) shared the same office space.

Apart from the above facilities, the building had the following offices: the offices of the student guidance counsellors, staffrooms for different subject areas, such as the English department etc., were the teachers in different subject areas could meet, store their teaching material or conduct private conversations with their students. Most of these facilities were later moved to the wing under renovation. The library, the school cafeteria, and the office of the student association are located in the basement of the main building. The main wing also contained a large assembly hall and a large hall that is solely used for examinations. Opposite the L-shaped building is a one-storey container-like building that housed a number of classrooms.

According to the director of the school, the school generally targets: a) students who want to improve their school grades, b) students who are interested in a professional education, or wish to improve their knowledge in a particular profession, c) students who dropped out of the ordinary school system and want to complete their education, d) students who want to complement their previous education with new courses. In order for students to be admitted to the system, they have to be 20 years old. But there are exceptions. For example secondary students who have completed at least two years of their secondary education can apply. In addition, in some

courses or programmes the student may require complementary education in order to be admitted to the course or programme.

Like the folk high school, the majority of immigrants, particularly newly arrived immigrants, are referred to the school by the immigration bureau and the social welfare service. These two organisations, in coordination with the job centre, are responsible for providing new immigrants with the necessary information about social services and resources available to them in the municipality as exemplified by the following statements of the director of the school and the students.

> I: How do you recruit students into the school?
>
> When they (immigrants) arrive in the municipality, they come in contact with the immigration office (invandrarbyrån) and the office sends them to us. When they come to us, we interview them and place them in the programme within a period of three weeks. In the interview we generally elicit information about their educational background, profession etc. (Director of Komvux)
>
> I: How did you get the information about the school when you arrived in the municipality?
>
> From the social welfare service and the immigration office. (Alex)
>
> From the immigration office. (Zlata)

Although many of the immigrant student were informed about Komvux by the social welfare and the immigration office, there were exceptions. Some of the immigrant students interviewed were referred to the school by the job centre. These are, however, immigrant students who have lived in Sweden for some time, as is evident in the statement below by the director of Komvux.

> If they (immigrants) are sent from the job centre, it can be that they came to Sweden several years ago, had jobs, became unemployed or are still employed but needed to improve their Swedish language, so they come to us.

A substantial number of immigrants who move to a given Municipality generally have a friend, a relative or members of their ethnic group etc., in the municipality. These ethnic groups act as interpreters of the Swedish society and culture. They provide the newly arrived immigrants with myths or folk tales about "the Swedish

society", and its institutions, including Komvux. These two types of information, the factual information provided by institutions and folk tales provided by friends and relatives, do not necessarily complement each other. One focuses on the rules, regulations and responsibilities and is provided by the above-mentioned institutions, whereas the other is based on individual experiences, myths and generalised abstractions about the institutions and the Swedish society in general.

This, however, is not strange. None of the immigrants who come to Sweden can speak Swedish, hence they rely on their relatives or members of their ethnic groups to interpret and make sense of the new social situation. They (ethnic group) consequently act at this stage as the "significant other" in the Meadian sense to the immigrant, interpreting the Swedish culture, life style etc., just like a parent interprets the norms and values of a society to a child. In brief, the immigrant is socialised into and appropriated to the objective world of being an immigrant in Sweden.

This role is later taken over by the Swedish institutions, both private and public, and the society in general as the individual increasingly becomes independent and masters the language. Apart from the different source of information, the value or importance attached to this information differs. For example, it is explicit that Zlata's initial attitude towards Komvux was negatively affected by the stories or views of the members of her ethnic group and other immigrants about the school (see Zlata's portrait, chapter 7). Unlike the immigrant students, the majority of the native students knew about Komvux through friends or were informed by the job centre. John, for example, in answering the question: "How did you know about Komvux," answered:

> In a course I went to. The course was organised by the job centre. When we finished the course, the course leader told us about Komvux.

While Laila, an "immigrant" student for example answered: "At the job centre ..."

On the other hand, the initial information about the school did not positively or negatively affect Laila's or John's attitude towards the school. Laila, however, was dissatisfied with the type of information she initially got vis-à-vis the school. According to her it was administrative, and not practical, information. For example, she did not know about the book exchange programmes, what facilities are available to the students etc. She had to find out about all these on her own.

The manner in which the system is organised, as noted earlier, allows students flexibility to develop their own educational programme which meets their needs, not only in terms of future career goals, but also in terms of their ability in particular programmes. It also allows students some control over the pace and the time they choose to study: students can choose to study full-time or part-time or combine evening and day studies. But the students have no control over the time allocated for each course activity (the minimum time for a course is 30 hours, and is established by the parliament). Apart from the flexibility of the course system, in terms of student choices, it also allows the schools to develop their own local profiles, based on the local needs of the community or the municipality.

The school, and its atmosphere can be described as a conveyer belt, with a number of stations and a rotating labour force, where every 45 minutes, the supervisor and workers change their work station, activity and the work group. The atmosphere is impersonal, the walls are painted dull white, there are no pictures or paintings inside or outside the class. In brief the spartan environment of the school and classes complements the nature of the school organisation: the maximum use of space and time, individuality, flexibility, adaptation to loose class formation, and work discipline – independent study habits by students with a minimum of supervision by teachers is the norm.

The multicultural characteristic of the research setting, however, is not reflected in the school organisation and its activities. For example, no bilingual educational programmes are offered in the schools, despite its obvious merit. Neither the language or culture of the "other" is apparent in the school in terms of pictures, artefacts, plays, literature or books. Nor is it apparent in the educational activities of the school, not even in the folk high school, where the school claims to have a strong cultural profile and specifically identified one of its aims as fostering cultural understanding and tolerance.

The educational programmes

The school has four major programmes: Swedish for immigrants (SFI), the basic educational programme, the secondary education programme, and the professional training programme and supplementary education. Each of these programmes is headed by an assistant director, and most of the decisions in a programme are decided within the programme. But the financial decisions and commitments with outside agencies, public or private, are negotiated by

the director and his management team, which includes, among others, the three assistant directors.

The basic adult education programme is equivalent to the 1-9 year primary education. The subjects in this programme are: Swedish, or Swedish as a second language, English, mathematics, social science, geography, history, religious knowledge, biology, physics, and chemistry.

Unlike the folk high school, there is very little sense of comradeship and contact between the students and teachers outside the class. The teachers are always rushing to or from their classes, just like the students. One rarely observed teachers informally talking to students in the same fashion as in the folk high school – the relation is strictly business like. This is partly due to the size and the nature of the organisation of the school, but also to the different traditions and cultures of the schools.

Before students are admitted into the school, Komvux, in consultation with the municipality, develops a catalogue of courses in different programmes and subjects for the next term, including the timetable for every course and subject. The potential students, with the help of the teachers and student counsellors, are expected to create an educational programme from this catalogue of courses to meet their individual needs. This organisation of the educational activities in the school is justified by the teachers and the director as a condition imposed by the State and municipal authorities on the school – that the system has to adapt its activities to meet the individual needs of the students. This is apparent, for example, in the basic and secondary school education programme. There are no streamed classes. Every class or subject is a different group or constellation, making it very difficult for a researcher to follow a group of students in different programmes or subjects. For example, in the programme that I followed (the basic education programme), there were three students that attended both English and mathematics, and one who attended mathematics, English and social science at the basic education level.

The placement of the students in the different levels of the programme depends on their educational background and the diagnostic test organised by the school at the beginning of every term. After completing the programme the students are awarded a compulsory-school leaving certificate if they pass the following core subjects: Swedish or Swedish as a second language, English, mathematics and civics.

The students

The data on the student background were compiled from school documents, interviews and from a brief questionnaire which the students were asked to fill in. Komvux is a multicultural school. According to the director of the school there are about 45 different language groups represented in the school. In the basic education programme (particularly in the English, mathematics, social science I observed) about 60% of the students were immigrants from: Iran, Somalia, Chile, Turkey, Syria, Bosnia etc. Most of them have lived in Sweden for at least three years, but a substantial number of them have been in Sweden for longer than three years.

The majority of the students in the programme are single women in their late 20s and mid 30s, primary school drop-outs, and with a relatively long working career. This description, however, fits the native student participants and not the non-native students. The non-native students are also in their mid 20s and early 30s, and have had no or little work experience in Sweden. With the exception of Mayte, all the non-native women lived with their partners, or were not single mothers.

When one looks at the social background of the students (using the parents' educational background as an indicator), four out of five Bosnians students, according to the teachers, had one or both parents with secondary or university education. The majority of the students, irrespective of their origin, however, come from a similar social situation or class, if we ignore the ethno-cultural background of the immigrant students.

The classrooms: Komvux and the folk high school

In Komvux, the classroom is organised like any traditional classroom in the world. On Wednesdays, in the English class, the seating arrangements in the class are changed so that the students sit facing each other. (On Wednesdays the activity during the whole period is speaking or conversation.) In this period, the class is usually divided into two groups. One group sits in the classroom and the other in another classroom if it is available, or in the English department's staffroom.

The only difference between the classes I visited (in Komvux) in terms of props and its arrangement is that in the mathematics class there was no tape recorder. It seems that it has no functional purpose in this mental subject, unlike English which requires listening and comprehension. But in every other aspect the props and their arrangements were similar in all the classes I visited in the school.

They were furnished with the basics, rows of chairs in straight lines, an overhead projector, a white board, and a chair and table for the teacher at the front of the class.

The folk high school, on the other hand, is less Spartan. The classroom walls are decorated with student's work and pictures and a bulletin board. On the class bulletin board, the class activities and notices are posted on the board, including the class timetable. This was the home class for the programme. However, in terms of props and their arrangement, there are no differences between the classes in Komvux and the folk high school.

Chapter 5

The social practices of labelling

In this chapter, I will describe how the actors' way of talking and acting can be interpreted in terms of social constructionism. This chapter will thus focus on the labelling practices the actors operate with and the pattern of interactions observed in the multicultural social situation in the two schools studied. According to Berger and Luckmann:

> On the other hand, I apprehend the other by means of typificatory schemes even in face to face situations, although these schemes are more "vulnerable" to his interference than in "remoter" forms of interaction ... The typification of social interaction become progressively anonymous the farther away they are from the face to face situation (1967, pp. 30-31).

Labelling or allocating identity types to a person are common social phenomena in everyday life in society, whether it is homogeneous or heterogeneous. There are, no doubt, many typifications in operation in any social situation that are used in marking divisions and constructing differences between perceived different social groups or social types. My point, however, is that any cultural group defined as alien or different, and with a different physical appearance from the norm, can be subjected to an additional form of othering, in addition to the common forms of otherings such as student-teacher, overweight etc. that people irrespective of their ethnicity, culture or race are subjected to. These social labelling practices, like any other labelling practices, are imbedded in the socio-cultural discourse in a particular society.

In the theoretical approach to this study, I emphasised that once words become associated with a concept, they become "fixed", which explains how all the users of the same language can communicate. Hence, in this study, I have no choice but to participate in the same language, in order to shed light on and problematise the language and conventions used to make sense of the multiculturality of the Swedish society.

Built into these labelling practices and markers of identities are conceptions of social types based on myths, stereotyping, perceived differences, and similarities. These identity markers are social constructions that reside in the language and the symbolic universe individuals are located in. It is through language that we make

explicable common meanings and experiences not only to the members of the collective but also to non-members.

The labels: "Immigrants" and "Swedes"

In chapter 2 and in the introduction to this chapter I emphasised that the objective of this study is to critically examine the social labels actors use to describe and argue over who they are or their identity in multicultural social situations in the two schools and their impact on the relations and experiences of the students and teachers in the two schools. The statements analysed here are extractions from the transcribed interview data, and are answers to different questions and statements from policy documents.

In the analysis of the data, it was not difficult to determine that students and teachers type each other using a variety of labels or typification categories. These categories are constantly changing character, content and meaning. But they are located in the language and are communicated to the members of a society in social interactions. They are, therefore, not simply categories through which people apprehend each other, but indicate a relation and prior knowledge about the different social groups which are produced and reproduced through a discourse of cultural diversity.

The category types that all the actors interviewed (students and teachers in both schools) use to describe the composition of the school are *immigrants* and *Swedes*, as evident in the following statements.

> ... Maths is not like that, it is a mixed group *Swedes* and *immigrants* ... (Teacher [K])

> It is obligatory for *immigrant* students to attend the SFI programme for one academic year ... (Student [K])

> ... *Swedes* know very little about *immigrants* ... (Student [K])

> The course I went to last year, it was much better, many of the students were *immigrants* ... (Student [K])

> It is ... I am surprised, despite the fact that they are people with immigrant background, one expected that they should know more Swedish, considering the number of years they have been in Sweden ... (Teacher [F])

91

The very use of the labels indicates that the two groups or social types are constructed as two different entities. In other words, the very use of the concepts structures and determines for us how we perceive the diversity of the Swedish school and society. The labels and concepts immigrant and Swede are thus fixed, allowing us to talk about the composition of the Swedish societies in those terms, and what it socially means. That is, it denotes a social type or a group of people in the Swedish society and the school that is constructed and defined as two different groups.

Some of the students typed as "immigrants" have lived most of their adult life in Sweden, but despite this condition they are defined, and define themselves, as "immigrant". For example, Claudio and Claudia came to Sweden in their early 20s and are now in their 40s. Mayte, on the other hand, came to Sweden when she was six years old and is now in her 20s. Hence, the social type "immigrant" or label is a relatively stable social type, i.e. it has no time frame, particularly when it is used to type non-European immigrants as one student pointed to me after the formal interview. "You know they will never accept us 'svartskallar'" ("svartskalle" is derogatory epithet).

It is, however, important to stress that the majority of the immigrant students interviewed in both the folk high school and Komvux are not naturalised Swedish citizens. Hence, the concept in its use essentialises and homogenises a group of people that are diverse in many aspects, and ignores differences based on age, gender, educational background and class, etc. Although in the talk immigrants perceive themselves as, or seem to accept the category, "immigrant" as a collective identity marker. This does not mean that they accept the social meanings or content of the allocated identity. I will focus on the content of the labels or typification in chapter 6.

The use of the concept "immigrant" is not limited in the "talk", but is also used in government reports, statistical reports, research, school curriculum and policy documents as evidenced below.

> In order to narrow the educational gap in society, the folk high school prioritises people who are educationally, socially, and culturally disadvantaged. This means recruiting people with little or no education, immigrants, handicapped, and other disadvantaged groups.

Consequently these categories are used to construct social groups that are identified, in certain characteristics, as different or the same in relation to each other and sometimes as disadvantaged as is

evident in the above statement. This perception of the immigrants is implicit in the policy of the folk high school, which, for example, expresses the need to recruit "immigrants" in the school in order to cure them from some cultural or social pathologies that are said to disadvantage "immigrants".

It is important to stress that the category and concept "immigrant" has a legal connotation, defining who the subjects of a nation state are, i.e. who has come from the outside into a pre-existing nation state. This juridical othering of perceived outsiders has implications, in terms of immigration policy, for example, who is allowed to come in or not. But this aspect of the perceived "stranger" is not the focus of this study. My focus is the social relation of the collective defined as "immigrant" and the collective defined as the "Swedes". The concept, therefore, attains a different meaning. It involves: the right of the individual and a group's sense of identity that is categorised as alien- the rights of citizenship in the host community, the experiences, marginalisation, and racism etc. perceived by the group defined as alien. These aspects are contested and are constantly negotiated in the public and private arenas of social interaction between the groups and individuals in the Swedish society.

The category "immigrant" is, however, slowly being abandoned in favour of the concept "ethnicity" in the multicultural debate and discourse in Sweden. For example, the Ministry of the Interior recently recommended that the concept "immigrant" ought to be re-evaluated (inrikesdepartementets faktablad). This shift from one category to the other is a good example of the dynamic aspect of how identities are constructed: new labels are introduced and old ones go "out of fashion". But it also shows the power of definition a group has in labelling who is who, and, in the process, who is in and who is out.

The labels "ethnicity and culture"

A second major category and concept the actors use to mark their differences in the multicultural social relation is ethnicity, such as "Swede", Somali, etc., country of origin, or language group such as "Arabs" as witnessed in the following statements.

> The mixture of different nationalities, I did not have this problem 20 or 25 years ago, I only had Swedish students ... (Teacher [K])

... More than 50% of my secondary student group come from Bosnia ... (Teacher [K])

... in the class that I teach, there are many Bosnians, not only Bosnians, but many other groups ... (Teacher [K])

The use of these categories, however, is rare unless the actors, irrespective of their ethnicity, are referring to specific characteristics or stereotypes associated with a particular ethnic or language group or "culture". For example, one of the teachers in Komvux pointed out to me that: "All Iranians want to become doctors or engineers, I think it is a high status to have a university education in Iran", or comments such as, "Somalis are a difficult group. "Swedes are 'afraid' of conflict or of other 'culture'."

The "native" students and teachers, in addition, seem to operate with a conception of ethnicity as synonymous with a static cultural perception, and associate "immigrants" with foreign "culture". For instance, the perceived difference and distance between the ethnic cultures of "Swedes" and Turks, but also the cultural homogeneity of the Swedish ethnic group is constructed in the process. An important aspect of this "cultural" reductionism is the arbitrary evaluation of cultural distance and closeness of the different groups that constitute the cultural diversity of the school and Swedish society.

My boyfriend is English, and when I introduce him to my friends they do not see him as an "immigrant". (Student [F])

I: What do you mean that they do not see him as an "immigrant"?

There is no big differences between our cultures, we have nearly the same values, there are no big differences, if you compare to an Iranian or a Turk. (Student [F])

We have admission groups for every class (meaning programmes) and we always try to have students from different cultures ... immigrants. (Teacher [F])

Culturally they all come from the same background. (Teacher [F])

I: What do you mean by the same background?

The majority are from this area or town, so there is no big geographical difference, then (in addition) I think they come from the same social/class background. (Teacher [F])

> In my lessons, I try to include different cultural perspectives ... to show also the Swedish students that there are different ways of thinking and different lifestyles. (Teacher [F])

> Because I teach social science (SÖ), there are issues of values involved or which come up, for example, on their (immigrants) views of women. This can create tensions or irritations, they (immigrants) have different values than Swedes. (Teacher [K])

One can discern a subtle difference in the use of the concept of culture. It seems to refer to a specific group of people – the non-European or non-western "cultures" or "immigrants". Hence, one can interpret that imbedded in the category "culture" as used in this context (the multicultural social context) is intricately related to who is white and who is not. For example, Claudia, Mayte and Claudio are a product of two "cultures". By typifying them as culturally different, the actors seem to emphasise their non-whiteness and, in the process, deny or ignore their "in betweeness" in the above talk.

The "cultural othering" imbedded in the talk encompasses a variety of people of different ethnicity, or shades of "whiteness" or "blackness", depending on who is talking. In the Anglo-Saxon countries, this collective is usually identified as "people of colour", and in Sweden they are generally typified as non-European or in the popular discourse as "blatte".

It is because of this perception and understanding of "whiteness" that the actors perceive themselves and are defined by the natives as different or deviant from the "normal", the natives. What is important in this context, however, is that the differences between the native and the immigrants are scripted. An important aspect of this script, as noted above, is "race", but stripped of its classical or biological meaning and instead replaced in the discourse with "culture". This subtle difference in the talk is essential in understanding the process of othering the "non-European immigrants" and the social relation between the natives and non-native students.

Ingrained in the use of this typification is, I think, a remnant of colonial categorisation that has returned to Europe as a consequence of immigration from the third world or developing countries. The "coloureds" in the post-colonial age are no longer geographically located outside Europe. They have instead become part of the cultural scenes in the major European cities such as London, Paris, Stockholm, etc. Consequently, the concepts have been revitalised in the multicultural discourse and given new meanings. Hence, the concepts "white" and "non-whites" and the meanings imbedded in them are neither stable nor do they mean the same thing in different

contexts and time. In addition they are not ahistorical as is implicit in the construction of difference above. Who is black and white is, in other words, contested as evident in chapters one and two.

In this talk the perceived "cultural" differences between the two groups are (in this process of differentiation) homogenised and, in the process, the "immigrant" is defined as the "cultural other". It is also important to stress that this construction of difference is not one-sided, as is apparent in the statement of the "non-native" students. However, what is important in this context is that the group and the individual are conflated, and the socially constructed differences are collectivised as peculiarly "Swedish" or "immigrant". This culturalist discourse attempts to fix and invent impermeable boundaries between groups. The explicit and implicit sentiments in the statements of the native and non-native are evidence of this.

However, this does not mean that people of colour are not culturally defined as "Swedes", but it is limited to a particular situation or incidences, such as within a circle of friends or family. For instance, the case of non-European adoptive or bi-racial children. They view themselves and are typified by their families and friends as "Swedes". However, in the day-to-day encounter outside their families and friends they will be, or are constantly forced to tell their life history to convince the "native" the basis on which they define themselves as "Swedes", or culturally are "Swedes". This, I believe, is due to the common perception and understanding of Swedishness as white, thus the non-white Swedes are excluded from that collective on that basis because they do not fit the conventional image of the "normal" Swede.

Institutional labelling of the actors

In the theoretical approach, I stressed that institutions are social constructions that emerge as a result of habitualisation, institutionalisation and sedimentation of human action, or talking about a social phenomenon in a particular manner. Katz writes:

> Institutions are created by groups of people to regulate society and make it meaningful to individual members. Institutions are understood by all members of society, although not necessarily in the same way (1996, p. 31).

Institutions, therefore, are social constructions and have not only a history, but they also have a control function. They operate with, reproduce and maintain the concepts, typifications and social mean-

ings inherent in the concepts. For example, the concept of the teacher is not only defined by the institution itself but also by the act of teaching. The policy statements of the folk high school, Komvux, and the statement of the director of Komvux, below, explicitly defines "immigrants" as different "culturally", and consequently have certain problems, or suggest that interacting with them can cause, or lead to, conflicts or misunderstandings.

> Sweden has a culturally pluralistic immigration policy, which means immigrants' home language and cultural background have to be respected and given some space. Consequently, there is an increasing need for Swedish teachers to understand these students' backgrounds and how and why their lifestyle and actions are different from those of the Swedes. This is particularly necessary where the differences can lead to conflict, or in other ways make it difficult to work or contradict the aim of the lesson (SOU 1984:4, p. 1).

> When they (immigrants) arrive in the municipality, they come in contact with the immigrant office and the office sends them to us. When they come to us we interview them and place them in a programme within a period of three weeks. In the interview we generally elicit information about their educational background, profession etc. ... (Director of Komvux)

Hence, the concept, or the label, "immigrant" culture and what it means socially is part of the institutional language in both the folk high school and Komvux. The very use of the concept structures the manner in which the institution encounters and integrates the collective defined as "immigrants" (see, for example, the context of the study, and the praxis of recruitment of immigrants in the two schools).

In addition, the curriculum of Komvux and the policy document of the folk high school above emphasise that in working with "immigrants" it is essential to respect their "culture". The "cultural" otherness of the "non-native" students is, therefore, identified as an important characteristic or trait that has to be respected, maintained and passed on. What is important in this context, however, is that the idea of "immigrant" as culturally different from the "natives", i.e. the norm is institutionalised and sedimented.

This notion of "immigrants" has, in the process, become the common social stock of knowledge within the dominant culture, which has been institutionalised and used to construct social policies and can function as a mechanism for marginalising immigrants. However, (and as I emphasised above) the construction of immigrants as

culturally different is not based on actual interaction between the actors, but is an incipient abstraction and understanding of the culture(s) of the non-native students.

In adopting this labelling practice "immigrant", the institution sanctions and legitimises not only the use of the category type per se, but also the meanings that are socially associated with the category and the group. Katz, in his theoretical discussion of racial and personal identity, similarly points out that institutions legitimise the meanings and actions of people in a collective. For example, they define to individuals and groups the category or race they are conceived to belong to and, in the process, what differences are constructed as important.

In spite of the multicultural nature or character of the two centres of adult education investigated, there was practically no pedagogical discussion by the teachers and the school leadership on how to meet the challenges of teaching socially and culturally diverse students, as is evident in the statement of the teacher below. Finally, although the folk high school has a gender equality plan, there are no similar plans or policies in either schools with respect to culture/ethnicity.

> As long as I remember, we have not had any pedagogical discussion. If you ask my colleagues, they will tell you that we meet every Monday, but I differentiate between pedagogical discussions and organisational questions, which books to buy or use, what to do with the national standardised test, etc. For me pedagogical questions are: Why should I teach a particular grammar? Is there a theoretical basis for such decisions? What learning perspective and theories am I using? That type of discussions, we do not have such discussions. (Teacher [K])

In the above description, it is apparent that "cultural" difference is identified as an important difference between the social group defined as "immigrant" in relation to the "Swede", or the norm. But what is important, however, is that the institutions legitimise the common sense and classical conception of "culture" as autonomous entities and static, which have to be maintained and reproduced. One can say that both schools in their encounter with the multiculturality of their students have adopted a passive strategy, built on an implicit perception of one country, one culture, one language, and one school.

The initial encounter: the pattern of interpersonal relations

The initial encounter, according to Larsson (1993), functions not only to establish order, routines, and patterns of interactions, but also establishes a sense of communal we-relationship. According to Beynon (1985):

> One of the few educational ethnographers to have written on initial encounters between teachers and pupils is Stephen Ball (1980). ... Ball isolates two crucial stages through which he proposes initial encounters pass: firstly, an observatory period in which pupils are quiet, passive and unsure where they stand. This is the honeymoon period. ... Secondly, there is a testing and information exchange stage in which the teacher may have determinedly to defend his/her authority and the expectation he/she hopes to establish (p. 36).

The initial encounter between the teachers and the students in both the folk high school and Komvux occurred long before banding the students into classes or groups. It occurred when the teachers started processing the students' applications, interviewing and testing them in order to determine their placement in the different programmes and subjects. In addition, both schools target a specific type of students, hence the teachers had a rough idea about the type of students they were going to teach (see the description of the study context).

The pattern of interaction described below crystallised in the initial encounter between the students and the school and is based on my observation. Although the initial encounter and patterns of the interaction are important and have implication for the students' life in the schools investigated, I decided early on in the study to focus on the students' perspective vis-à-vis the pattern of interaction that emerged. In my observations of the social interaction in both Komvux and the folk high school, one could discern two types or patterns of interactions: (a) a pattern of non-interaction, and (b) conflict.

The folk high school: the pattern of non-interaction

On the first day of my field-work, I arrived at the folk high school at about 8:30. The school was buzzing with last-minute preparation for welcoming the new students. At about 8:45, the old students started to arrive, one by one, standing in and outside the school, chatting

with other students and teachers. By 9:15, nearly all the students were in the school, and slowly moving downstairs to the school auditorium. By 9:30, all the students and most of the teachers were assembled in the school assembly hall. A few seconds later the head teacher came in and, without wasting any time, said:

> Nice to see all of you again. We will start the assembly by singing a song. Can anyone suggest a song?

None of the students volunteered, and the head teacher, pointing to a student, said: "Anna, can you suggest a song for us."

The student opened a Nordic song book (which all the students had), and suggested a song. I later found out that it was a ritual to sing a song at every school assembly. On the board a teacher had written the following:

a) welcoming group
b) assembling information folders for the new students
c) cleaning the assembly hall etc.
d) making refreshments

The head teacher then asked the students to volunteer for each task, which the students did with no discussion or question. A teacher was then assigned to each group, and the assembled students were dismissed and told to assemble again at 2:00 in the afternoon.

The welcoming group, according to the head teacher, were to act as mentors to the new students. They were also expected to show the students around and answer their questions about the school. The task of the information group was to prepare information folders for the new students, and the two other groups were to clean the assembly hall and prepare refreshments for the students and the staff. The idea behind this exercise is to inculcate in the students the value and importance of the social aspect of the educational activities of the school. The activities were intended to establish a we-relationship and an introduction to how things are done in the school, establishing the rules and regulation, what is acceptable and not acceptable; in brief, inculcating democratic principles in the students and a sense of belonging to the school as a community.

On the second day, the students assembled in their home class at about two in the afternoon. Present in the class were two teachers, John and Johanna, and they introduced themselves and me in the following manner.

I came at about the same time with the two home class teachers. When I came into the class, the students were already assembled in

their home class. The class teachers (John and Johanna) presented themselves and me to the assembled students in the following manner.

> My name is John and this is Johanna. We are your home teachers and responsible for the basic education programme and this is Ali. He is a research student from Linköping University.

It is essential to stress that my intention on that day was not to observe the pattern of interactions, but to observe the process of introduction or orientation of the new students in the school. But as any field worker discovers, it is practically impossible to predict the course of events in the field. The action of the actors on that day determined the nature and direction of the study.

After this brief presentation, Johanna informed the students about the changes in the time-table, the facilities available to the students, and different committees the students are expected to select class representatives to. The process took about 10-15 minutes. Then Johanna asked the class: "Anything you do not understand? Any questions?" None of the students commented or asked any question. John then said: "Johanna and I will show you the facilities available in the school." Then John arbitrarily divided the class into two groups and said: "This group will follow me and the rest will follow Johanna." I joined John's group. The tour of the school facilities took about 10 minutes. During the tour the students remained quiet while the teacher talked and showed the students the different facilities available in the school.

When the teachers completed the tour of the school, they all (both teachers and the students) assembled in the downstairs student kitchen and were served with refreshments (coffee and sandwiches). The most interesting things that I observed or noticed were how the immigrants students gravitated to each other and sat together irrespective of their ethnicity and gender, while the "Swedish" students also gravitated to each other. Unlike immigrant students, however, the "Swedish" students sat according to gender. None of these students knew each other; in fact this was their second day as a class or a group.

On the third day, I decided to focus on the seating arrangement in the class to see whether the students sat in the same pattern described above. To my surprise the seating arrangement reflected the same pattern observed on the second day. In the folk high school, there were three non-native students, Claudia, Ali and Amineh. Claudia is from Chile, Ali, from Iran and Amineh, from

Turkey. Ali and Claudia sat next to each other. Next to them sat Eric. When Ali dropped out of the programme, Claudia found herself sitting next to Eric, and when he also dropped out of the programme she sat in the same position. Amineh, on the other hand, sat alone most of the first term, behind Nina and Lena.

At the end of the first term, a number of students complained to the teachers that the class atmosphere (this will be described in detail later in this section) was getting worse, and they attributed it to the social structure that emerged in the class. In order to improve the climate, the students decided to change the seating arrangements. As a consequence, Peter moved and sat next to Amineh. Despite these minor changes the social structure that emerged and the pattern of interaction between the students remained constant throughout my field work.

The seating arrangements per se are not important but the pattern of interactions that emerged as result of it is. It was a common sight to see Claudia interacting with Ali during the class work, asking questions or talking to him. When Amineh sat alone, she neither interacted with Lena and Nina, who sat in front of her, nor with Maria, who sat alone behind her. This pattern of interaction was only interrupted during group work and only when the teachers organised the group work. When Ali dropped out of the programme, Claudia had no choice but to work and interact with Eric in the class. But most of the time she sat passive, and Eric did most of the group work for her. When Eric also dropped out of the programme, Claudia worked with Amineh who sat across from her, but maintained her seating position in the class.

During the lessons and classroom activities, immigrant students rarely interacted with the teacher or the native students, unless the teacher or the native students took the initiative. That is, they rarely contributed to the class discussion, or offered suggestions to students' or teachers' ideas on their learning situation or class activities. For example, during my field work I did not see Claudia or Ali initiate classroom interaction unless the teacher or the other students initiated it. In group work, Claudia, as noted above, depended on Ali, and later, Eric.

Similarly, Amineh was inactive in class interactions until the start of the second term, during which she became relatively active, particularly in group work. This change occurred when Janne changed his seating and sat with Amineh at the beginning of the second term. Until the end of the year these two worked together regularly and were later joined by Claudia when Eric dropped out of the programme.

Outside the classroom context, the pattern of interaction was slightly different. It was a very common sight to see pockets of ethnic groupings of students from Somalia, the Middle East, or Latin America socialising and conversing in their native languages, unlike the classroom, where the pattern was to a large extent "immigrant" and Swede" patterns of interaction. This pattern was also evident at the end of the school day. When students left the school premises, the groupings were ethnic based.

The municipal adult education: the pattern of non-interaction

The first day of school in Komvux, unlike the folk high school, was characterised by a businesslike atmosphere. There were no singing or refreshments, there was no welcoming of the new or the old students, nor speeches by the director of the school. I met the teacher I was assigned to at about 8:10, and I followed her to the class. During this period, the teacher introduced herself, checked the list against the students present, and talked a little about the literature of the course, the structure of the programme, what she expected from the students, and how she expected them to work.

In this introductory process, the teacher established the frame of relation between her and the students, what she expected from them, and what they should expect from her. During this presentation, not one student asked a question, or suggested a change or alternative to the teacher's ideas. This induction process took about 20 minutes. The teacher then distributed a stencilled text with questions and asked the students to work on the text, telling them that: "This is not a test, but it is a help for me to get a general idea about your level in English."

Most of the students completed the test in about 20 minutes and they handed it to the teacher one by one, and left. In the 40 or so minutes I was in the class, I noticed that there were no immigrants in the class. After the class, I talked to the teacher, and she told me that some of the immigrant students had dropped out of the programme, and some did not confirm their participation in the programme. I went back to the director and informed him about my intention again. He told me that he would try to contact me in two weeks. By that time, he hoped, things would have settled down and he would have a clear picture of the composition of the classes in the different programmes. After about two weeks I contacted the director and I was assigned to another programme, the basic education programme. Although my contact with the group studied occurred two weeks after the school had opened and classes had

begun, the pattern of interaction described in the folk high school above was also apparent in Komvux, if one looks at the seating patterns and interactions in and outside the class environment.

The seating arrangement in this class was based on ethnicity, language groups and gender. For example, until Alex dropped out of the English course, he always sat with a student from Iran at the back of the class. When this student was absent, he either sat alone or with other immigrant students in the class. Similarly, in the mathematics class he either sat alone or with Santiago and Laura, both from Latin America. Zlata and her husband, on the other hand, (both from Yugoslavia) always sat together. When her husband dropped out of the programme, she sat either with a young woman from Yugoslavia or with other immigrant students. Claudio from Chile and Judith from Angola always sat together, and if one was absent, the other rarely sat with any other students. In the mathematics class, however, Claudio sat alone. The social interaction outside the class in both schools was strictly based on ethnic lines or language groups, primarily because in Komvux the number of the non-natives from similar ethnic or language backgrounds was compared to the folk high school.

In the description of the context of the study, I stressed that the Spartan nature of Komvux, its highly individualised educational activities, the maximum use of time and space, and the short time of induction are intended to instil in the students discipline, independent work habits, and responsibility. The message of the system to the student from the school is that "nobody is going to hold your hand, you are an adult student and you are responsible for your learning. Our job as teachers is to help you achieve your goals." This individualistic learning climate does not encourage the social aspect of education/learning, hence it is essential to understand the social structures described above in the context of the institutional "culture" of the school.

The views of teachers

In the above description, it is evident, that the native and non-native students have very limited interaction with each other in and outside the two schools. The teachers are aware of the social segregation or clannishness between the students in the school, and according to the teacher below, given the choice, the students tend to choose their own type or social group to work with. In other words, Swedes prefer to work with Swedes and immigrants prefer to work with other immigrants or with their own specific cultural and language groups etc.

In fact one must not use the word force. Group constellations in the class have to be steered or these different groups of people cannot come into contact. Given free choice, they will choose people from their social group, nationality etc. (Teacher [K])

It can depend on the Swedes, if we can use that expression, they come here and they are not used to dealing with foreigners, immigrants. They may also have prejudices about immigrants and are therefore suspicious and careful, which makes it difficult for them to interact with them. Immigrants, on the other hand, their Swedish language is limited, which makes it difficult for them to interact with the natives. There are some who are very talkative, and good, but the majority are shy, or unsure. (Teacher [F])

Well, they have to learn a new language, and have difficulty in getting work, have no or little contact with Swedes and so on ... it's a difficult situation for the majority of immigrants. (Teacher [K])

Immigrant students have experienced difficult things in their journeys, traumatic things, and probably will not ... and will have difficulty in adjusting in Sweden. (Teacher [K])

I: I rarely see Claudia, Ali and Amineh work with the other students in the class. What do you think is the reason for that?

I have noticed that too, but it might also be that they are aware of their identity as immigrants, that Ali goes and sits with them, because they are afraid of not being accepted by the Swedes. And the Swedes are also afraid to associate with immigrants. (Teacher [F])

I: I rarely see Claudia, Ali and Amineh work with others in the class, what do you think is the reason for that?

I noticed that, too. They did it from the first day. Ali and Claudia attended the immigrant course together, they know each other, Amineh is new. Claudia, in the beginning, worked a lot with Eric. I have seen her work a lot with Eric in group work for a while. But it was not good because Eric did all the work for her. Instead she now works with Amineh. In the beginning Ali and Amineh worked together a lot. (Teacher [F])

The teachers, in the above statements, attribute the social clannishness of the immigrants and the Swedish students to a number of factors: a) Swedes are prejudiced, b) the poor ability of immigrants to communicate in Swedish, c) psychological traumas affecting immigrants in their immigration to Sweden, d) social segregation of

immigrants. In simple terms, the common social constructions of immigrants in Sweden or what the above teacher calls the perception of immigrant identity.

To avoid work groups based on ethnicity, and language groups, the teachers sometimes manipulate group work formation in the class. This strategy is common in both schools. But as is evident in the statement of one of the folk high school teachers, this by itself is not enough. What is required, according to him, are common and challenging day-to-day activities in the school work.

> The only possibility that I see is the day-to-day work. One can have invited them to coffee together many times, but it does not help. What is needed is some type of day-to-day cooperative work that makes them tackle problems together. (Teacher [F])

The social marginalisation of non-natives, as witnessed by the statements of the teachers, is closely associated with the social situation of non-natives in Swedish society in general. All these factors, according to the teachers, impact negatively on the perception of immigrants by the natives, but also colour the perception of immigrants in interacting with the natives. Implicitly immigrants are simultaneously constructed as victims, and at the same time blamed for their social situation and marginalisation. That is, the problem is reduced either to the "culture" or "language" ability of immigrants instead of, for example, the social structure and institutional mechanisms that cause their marginalisation.

The perspective of the students

All native students interviewed in both Komvux and the folk high school seem to emphasise that it is the non-native students who are not willing to be part of "Us" – the "Swedish" group, as is evident in the following statement.

> I: Nina, I have been observing the interaction between the students, I have rarely seen you talk and work with Amineh, Claudia or Ali ...
>
> They do not want to sit with us, they sit together. I do not know, it can be that they are afraid of us, or that they are uncertain, I do not know. This thing with women, you know, they do not make the decisions at home and that stuff. What I understand is that it is the men who make the decisions at home. (Nina [F])

> Immigrants always sit together, they talk in their language, and it is difficult ... I do not know ... probably they are scared. (Lotta [F])
>
> I: Scared of what?
>
> I do not know, but you do not want to force yourself on people who do not want you in their company.
>
> ... As a Swede might see it ... immigrants talk a lot in their language and it is impossible for a "Swede" to understand what they are saying. (Laila [K])

Laila, Lotta and many of the "native" students that I interviewed in both Komvux and the folk high school attribute the isolation of immigrants to their cultural difference, and their social habit of talking in their home language making it difficult for Swedes to interact with them. Hence, the native student interprets these social acts as a rejection, or lack of motivation by immigrants to adapt. But what is important in this context is that the behaviour of immigrants (clannishness} is "culturalised", and reduced to a language problem, while the Swedish language and culture is not, or is taken for granted.

Kiki attributes the clannishness of the "others" to their culture and the poor language skills of immigrants in Swedish. Kiki, however, unlike the majority of the students interviewed, does not share or attribute the social isolation of immigrants to the cultural difference argument, but to individual preferences, chemistry.

Santiago and Alex below, however, attribute their social isolation in relation to the native student to a consequence of the native students' actions manifested in their body language, attitudes etc. towards immigrants.

> ... You know ... You feel it. When you sit with them they talk to each other, you are not welcomed ... you just feel it. (Santiago [K])
>
> I feel comfortable with the others when I speak in my language. I'm not going to let them think that I speak bad Swedish, or tyrannise me because of that. That is why I am always with my friends, who I can speak to in my language and at the same level. That is why you see Chileans sit together in the cafeteria and Swedes also sit together. (Alex [K])
>
> Many Swedes are racist, and it is difficult for us to make it in Komvux you know ... You know it, they avoid you, they do not

> even want to sit next to you, even your classmates, they rarely greet you ... (Omar [K])

This perception of the native as prejudiced was common among all the immigrants I interviewed in both Komvux and the folk high school. By defining the native students as prejudiced, the immigrants turn inwards to other immigrants or to their language or ethnic groups to provide them with a sense of belonging, security and friendship. This, in turn, perpetuates and strengthens the social isolation of immigrants in the school and partly explains the nature of the interaction between the two groups that is apparent in the above description.

In addition it is also important to point out that the majority of immigrants and Swedes do not live in the same neighbourhood, and they rarely have similar leisure time activities or hobbies. Therefore, it is not strange that there is little or no interaction between the two group. But, in the final analysis, both immigrants and the native students perceive interethnic or intercultural interactions as risky, or potentially risky. This, however, as I stressed earlier, is not based on actual interaction but on incipient cultural abstraction of the "other".

The group conflict

The above set of interactions or patterns is not the only interaction that was observed in the field. A second pattern was observed in the folk high school and was made up of two groups, all native students. The first set was composed of 5 students, while the second group consisted of 3 women and one man. The rest of the native students in the class (all male students) were perceived to prefer one group or the other. In my interviews with them, however, this third and diffuse grouping perceived themselves as independent, i.e. not preferring either. But from my observation they tended to associate with group one students outside the classroom context. Membership of the two groups is as follows.

Group One (the closely knit group)	**Group Two (the loosely knit group)**
Marie	Nina
Gunilla	Martin
Anette	Lena
Josephine	Mia
Tim	

One could describe the Group One students as a tightly knit group. They sat at the back of the class in a row and always interacted and socialised with each other in and outside (during lunch and coffee breaks) the class. Even during group assignments, they rarely worked with the other students in the class unless the teachers intervened and determined the work groups. Similarly, the Group Two students preferred to work together, unless the teachers intervened. Apart from Lena and Nina, there was little interaction between Group Two students outside the class.

In the class, with the exception of Lena, Group Two students were generally passive, doing whatever the teacher said without complaints or fuss, whereas Group One students, particularly Josephine and Gunilla, were active making suggestions and occasionally rejecting teachers' and students' ideas about school activities, or the teacher's perspective. Sometimes they openly showed their lack of interest in what the teachers were doing in the class. In brief they dominated the class activity and discussion, causing tension, which flared into an open conflict at the end of the first term.

The intergroup relationship worsened (in the folk high school) in the last months of the first term. One of the teachers took up the issue in the class and started the discussion in the following manner: "There is a lot of talk about this class. Is there a real conflict between you or is it just imagined?" There was total silence in the class, and the tension was obvious. Gunilla and Josephine silently looked at each other and nodded. Nobody said anything. Then the teacher said: "I want you all to think before you answer the following questions?" Then she wrote the following on the writing board.

a) What is your aim here?
b) What is the problem?

The teacher then asked: "Is there anyone who does not want to participate in this discussion?" The class was silent, nobody said anything for a few seconds, then Anette, a member of the closely knit group said: "Some of the students in this class think that we dominate the class." A second member of the group added:

> And the teachers are protecting them. They should stand for their opinion and discuss it openly in the class instead of going behind our back to the teachers. (Gunilla)

None of the other students replied or made a comment, and the teacher said: "I think it would be a good idea if everybody par-

ticipated." The class murmured "Yes". The teacher said: "So we will go around the class starting with Lena. What do you think, Lena?

> I think the atmosphere in the class is not good. The class is divided in two groups.

Eva replied to Lena's spontaneously without waiting her turn. "I do not see the two groups you are talking about."

After an exchange of accusations between the two groups, the teacher said: "It is obvious there is a problem, but how do we solve it?" One of the male students said: "Probably it would be a good idea to re-arrange the seating arrangements in the class." A number of students murmured: "Yes". "Any other suggestions," the teacher asked. The class was silent. Then the teacher said: "Let us re-arrange the desks then." The desks in the class were then re-arranged. But it is interesting to point out that although the desks were re-arranged, the students sat basically in the same position or next to the same individual as before, with the exception of Janne, who changed his usual seating position and sat next to Amineh.

The consensus among all the students was that there was a problem, but they could not agree on the cause of the problem. The common perception among Group One students was that it was Group Two students, and particularly Martin, who caused the problem, and not them. They were the ones who chose to isolate themselves from the rest of the class and then accused them of being the cause of the problem.

In the class discussion, and in my interviews with the students, it was explicit that the act of going to the teachers or "snitching" to the teachers, was regarded by many students, but particularly by Group One students, as unacceptable behaviour for an adult. This act of going to the teacher and who to blame for the situation became the issue instead of the poor social climate in the class. For example, according to Gunilla and Josephine, it was Martin and some of the Group Two students who triggered it.

> It is like this. I am sorry but I have to say this, what comes up first is the typical Swedish jealousy. Some are capable and some are not, and they become jealous. It has been bad. The climate in the class has been bad. There are some students in the class who cannot tell you what they think and go behind your back to the teachers. I think they are just jealous. Then there is this character, Martin. He cannot even stand up for what he said to the teacher, he sits there and denies it all. (Josephine)

> The conflict was stressful. There were some students who went to the teachers, Martin and others, and said a lot of things which were not true. They (meaning the teachers) thought there was a conflict, I was one of the accused. Some of us had fun together. One has to do that in order to endure going to school. There are still tensions, but it is better now. I don't like when they go to the teachers. If someone has a problem with me then they should come directly to me. (Gunilla)

Josephine and Gunilla, above, similarly blame Group Two students for the conflict. According to them the accusation was false, but more importantly, they were upset by the fact that these students went to the teacher and "snitched" on them, and that the teacher sided with Group Two, or accepted their version of the situation in the class.

As far as Nina is concerned, she distanced herself from the group not because of the group formation or her exclusion from it, but due to the attitude and behaviour of Group One students towards John in class interactions.

> I can only talk for myself. The whole thing started when I distanced myself from some of the students in the class. You know who John is in our class. He is a little bit handicapped, his hearing is poor, and when some of the students behaved badly towards him, as if he was stupid, it was then that I became angry. There is nothing wrong with his intellect. For example, the moment he starts to talks, they start to talk to each other, they don't listen to what he says. (Nina)

On the other hand Martin felt he was unfairly accused by the class, particularly by the Group One students, of creating the problem, which, he argues, all the students in the class talked about in private. His only "crime" was to bring it to the attention of the teachers.

> Our class is a bit special. But just then I was bullied, despite the fact that there were many students who said the same thing, I was the scapegoat. I don't want to talk about it any more. (Martin)

In the class discussion the non-native students acknowledged that there was a problem in the class, but in the discussion in the class they were not particularly active. In fact one can say they were indifferent to the whole discussion. Their action and demeanour seemed to say that the conflict was between two groups of Swedes and it was not their business. In the interview I mentioned my

observation and interpretation vis-à-vis the conflict and the demeanour of the non-native students in the class to Claudia and she pointed out that:

> It was difficult to be part of their group. Then I learned to know them better, I did not care anymore. I say hi or ignore them, you see it in their face when they want to greet you or not. (Claudia)
>
> I: Who's group?
>
> The Swedes in the class and the problem was among them. I don't care about their conflict. (Claudia)

The conflict, according to Claudia, was between the native students. Similarly, Ali pointed out to me that the problem or conflict was not his problem – meaning that it was between the natives and none of his concern. Hence, the ambivalence or indifference exhibited by immigrant students can be interpreted as a reaction to their marginalisation. One can also argue that the marginalisation of immigrants was not considered a problem, or was perceived as "normal". In brief, the non-native students did not count, and this perception is apparent in Claudia's and Ali's statement, but also in the very nature of the conflict – a group of native students felt that they were marginalised by a group of native students in the class, and therefore it was constructed as a problem and thus became a problem.

In Komvux, this type of group formation and social dynamics was not observed. This is mainly due to the nature of the organisation of the school. Unlike the folk high school, Komvux has a highly individualised educational programme and the students rarely take more than one lesson together as a class (see the context description). Consequently this does not provide the students with the condition for groups to form and crystallise.

What is clear, however, is that social structures that arise in a collective, whether they are based on ethnicity, culture etc., affect the quality of interaction and relationships between the subgroups. Moreover, the pattern of interaction, or open conflicts, that emerges in multicultural social situation does not necessarily assume an "Us" and "Them" character, but cuts across groups. It fuses together different members of the groups and depends on the social relations between them, and the actors' definition of the situation. In other words, the social codes that bind the groups are contested, the big picture becomes irrelevant or diffuses as a result of personal

interests, solidarity and loyalties to a group. But it shows that clannishness can also emerge in groups perceived as ethnically or culturally homogeneous and that natives can be marginalised, within and between the different social groups.

This should not, however, be interpreted to mean that group formation in a collective is a negative or a positive phenomenon. Groups and subgroups arise in any social collective and can challenge the dominant views and common sense knowledge in the collective. This is, instead, a consequence of individuals' interpretation and constructions of their realities in the collective, or individuals being active constructors of meaning.

In the above description, it is apparent that the actors also operate with other types of label apart from the ones I described above, such as disabled, gender, student, teachers, norm (challenging unwritten group norms or rules such as "snitching" to the teacher or "snitching" to the authorities). But not all these constructions are defined as "cultural"; for example, a disabled native is not perceived as culturally different from a non-disabled Swede and his disability is not culturalised. That is not to say, however, that the disabled person is perceived differentially in different socio-cultural contexts. In other words, though concepts such as "disabled" are a social construction, they are not viewed as a primary identity in the multicultural social context and discourse. Similarly, the category student is a social construction, but in this context is not used to marginalise a social group that is defined as student, i.e. a student is a student irrespective of the student's social, ethnical or social backgrounds.

Discussion

In the above description, culture, immigrant, ethnicity and nationality are the dominant labelling categories. These categories are explicitly and implicitly used and function as a mechanism of constructing a collective in the Swedish society as the "other". Similarly, the non-native students other the native student on the basis of their attitude to them, and define them as an essentially prejudiced homogenised group.

One cannot help but discern a strong sense of boundary between the natives and the immigrants. This boundary is evident in the talk and the pattern of interactions described above. But if one examines the students' socio-economic or bio-data, irrespective of how they are labelled, they have many things in common. Among these are:

(1) The majority are women in their late twenties or thirties and have families. (2) Many of them have a poor educational background and come from similar social backgrounds (in terms of the educational background of their parents). However, there are also differences between these students: the majority of the non-native students have no working experience in Sweden, and live in areas where immigrants are the dominant groups, therefore it is not surprising that they have little or no interaction between the two groups.

Although the students have certain commonalities, they also have some differences, but in the talk described above and in the multicultural social discourse and debate, the various identity(ies) of the immigrant students are generally ignored and emphasis is put on their primary ethnic/cultural belonging. These are then used to create boundaries between the various communities that constitute multicultural Sweden.

These primary labels and identities are described in this chapter in terms of dichotomies such as: "immigrant" – "Swede", "cultural us" versus "cultural them", "native students" versus "non-native students" etc. It is also implicit in the description that I do not perceive these differences and dichotomies as being of equal value. In other words, these difference are constructed in relation to a norm and attain their meaning in relation to the norm. So the concept "immigrant" has no meaning without the concept "native" or "Swede", nor is there cultural difference without a cultural norm. But more importantly, it indicates the power relation in a society – the power of some to label others.

The concept "immigrant" is a popular and common-sense category the actors use in constructing differences and identities in relation to each other in the multicultural social discourse. In order to lay bare this convention, it is important to problematise the category. Until recently the label "immigrant", according to Tesfahuney, referred to:

> All non-Swedish persons born outside Sweden irrespective of whether these are citizens of a foreign country or have been naturalised Swedes. The definition included second generation immigrants. As of 1997, the definition has been changed and all persons born in Sweden with one or both expatriate parents are now considered Swedes (1998, p. 104).

The category "Swede" serves therefore as a yardstick to determine characteristics or areas where the immigrant is similar to the Swede or vice versa. The use of the "immigrant" – "Swede" category is a

social construction. But in this construction "immigrant" is used to denote, or is a code word for, "non-European" immigrants, or a collective in Sweden that are commonly perceived as "non-white". It is this group that is defined as different, and the difference is said to be their "culture". Hence, although "race" in the classical sense is not part of the labelling repertoire, this does not mean that it does not exist. The concept of "race" is consequently imbedded in the concept of "culture". In other words, it is the cultures of non-European "immigrants" that are defined as different.

It is also important to point out that the respondents in this study are adults, and unlike children or teenagers are sophisticated and may shy away from issues related to race and from revealing it to me, a person of colour. One can therefore argue that, irrespective of the labelling categories used by the native actors, the most important difference involves a division, or a marker of identity of who is "white" and who is not. In other words who is a genuine Swede and who is not a Swede (a Blatte).

What is apparent in the action or the lack of interaction between the actors, particularly between the natives and non-native students can be defined as a sedimented pre-judgement, turned into prejudice. The immigrant is perceived/defined by the native actors as a different, whereas the native students, on the other hand, are perceived as prejudiced. One can say the lack of interaction between the two groups is a consequence of pre-interaction attitudes that come into play in the interaction between groups constructed as essentially different. Schneller (1992) writes:

> Since my culture is the right and only normative one, my partner is strange, not possessed of normal values, and is backward, inferior. When I meet other representatives of his group in future, I will have to take his backwardness into account in advance (p. 135).

Similarly, according Johnson et al. (1992) the meeting between individuals from different ethnic groups involves sedimented impressions about each other. The pre-interaction attitudes can either be negative or positive. Second, proximity is essential but not a guarantee of positive relationship as is apparent in the two school contexts. They write: "If physical proximity were sufficient to create positive cross ethnic relationships, all theorising could end at this point." But they argue that proximity can, on the contrary, lead to things getting worse. Third, they theorise that if positive relations occur as a result of proximity, it depends on: "... whether cross ethnic interaction takes place within a co-operative, competitive or

individualistic context. A co-operative context promotes a process of acceptance while a competitive and individualistic context promotes a process of rejection.

Harrington and Miller (1992) also point out that the categorisation of differences is a process that is essential in ordering the world for the individual, and reflects power relations in a society. In addition they point out that :

> Moreover, social categories such as race, gender, age and occupation become associated within a given culture with physical features, personality traits, preferences, values and behaviour. The specific content of these associations constitutes the stereotypes of a social group (ibid., p. 165).

Hence, certain social activities are or can be viewed as natural for certain categories of person. Consequently the nature of occupation and social stratifications of polyethnic societies can be attributed to the social construction of traits and perceived abilities associated with a given group.

Summary

From the above description one can identify three main typification categories: immigrant, culture, and ethnicity or language group such as Arabs. In both schools these typifications permeate the manner in which the actors define immigrants as different or the same in relation to the natives. But in the talk described above, these categories or labels are used, or are code words, for defining a specific group as different. Hence, the implicit and explicit differences in the talk of "cultural difference" is not a declaration and acceptance of diversity per se, but a mechanism for universalisation and exclusion of non-white immigrants. Their exclusion is legitimised through a discourse of representing them as different.

It is, however, important in this context to stress that in my formal and non-formal conversation none of the native actors in the two schools, used racial categories or anecdotes to describe and understand the actions of the "others", despite the multi-racial characteristics of the student body in the two schools. Similarly, during my field work, I have never heard students or teachers in or outside the classrooms use racially derogatory terms or jokes to describe the "others". But this should not mean that such perceptions do not exist.

I do not, nor does social constructionism, deny the existence of different types of people, but my contention is that although there are many forms of social othering in operation, some are shared by all the actors, such as gender, class etc., but the difference considered here is an additional form that can be and is used in the talk and action of the actors to construct non-native students or immigrants as different to legitimise their marginalisation.

The use of these terms is not and should not be interpreted to be the construction of the teachers or the actors in this study. It is part and parcel of the everyday language, both in the private and public domain, as is evident in the use of these categories by the actors and by institutions. Their use reproduces a particular pattern of action and relationship, i.e. it has social consequences. Therefore the talk in this sense is not "innocent", it structures and determines the manner in which we view the world.

Reflections

It is obvious that the data analysed above are derived from interviews with the actors in the two schools. I am the first to admit that my conversation with the actors was not problem-free. Some of these problems and issues are described in the chapter on methodology. During my interviews with the actors I was frustrated by the talk or the construction of the "other" that emerged in my conversation with the native actors, particularly their simplistic notion and normative perspective of "culture" which they used to construct the immigrants as different.

As an immigrant and a researcher, I am not immune or excempted from these constructions of difference. This is apparent in my analysis of the data. I chose to focus on the perceptions of immigrants and the manner in which they are othered. My point of departure in the analysis is that the construction of differences between the different groups is not of equal value. In addition, explicit in my interpretation is a rejection of being categorised and typified as different or fixing my identity without a prior dialogue with me as the other. Hence, my focus on the natives is a conscious choice on my part to show the weaknesses and the emptiness of the concepts used to differentiate immigrants from the native and in the process show the oppressive nature of these concepts commonly used by the natives in the multicultural social discourse in Sweden. This is also used to justify excluding immigrants from mainstream society and in developing not only educational policies, but policies

in other social areas. It is also an attempt on my part to participate in the dialogue and make my voice and experiences heard. In other words, to fill the blanks in the unfinished knowledge.

For example, in my case, I am a Somali, from a middle-class background, "black" naturalised Swede, and have lived most of life outside the country of my origin or "culture". But at the same time, I am forced to participate in a language game that attempts to reduce me to either one or the other category in the multicultural discourse and construct my realities in Sweden on a specific identity that is defined for me by the dominant "culture". It also puts me in a situation where I have to define myself in relation to a diffuse, "other", but also implicitly to define my identity(ies) and pick one which I believe is the most important identity. My role as a researcher is therefore set in a field of tension between discourses that attempt to fix my identity and my own conception of my identity. These contradictions and tension are both explicit and implicit in my analysis and interpretation of the data.

Chapter 6

The "other" as a problem

In chapter 5 I described a number of labels the actors use to indicate the difference between themselves and the other, or the construction of self and other. This cannot and should not be perceived as simply wanton subjectivism, or simply the construction of the insider-outsider dichotomy, but a construction that is specific in a given social-cultural context. I do not dispute the fact that there are different types of people, but wish to emphasise instead that we constantly categorise people and assume all sorts of things about them. In addition, some differences are viewed as significant. Young, a feminist researcher, points out that:

> The categories according to which people are identified as the same or different ... are social constructs that reflect no nature or essence. They carry and express a relation of privilege and subordination, the power of some to determine for others how they will be named, what differences are important for what purpose (1994, p. 715).

These labels or categories are central concepts in the multicultural debate and discourses, as is evident in chapter one, but also in the talk of the actors described in chapter 5. According to Olneck (1995), the encounter between the non-native and native students in the school is conditioned by a number of factors the most important of which are: the perceptions of the actors, and the rules and regulation of the institutions. In this chapter, I will focus on the perceptions of the actors, i.e. the frames of references the actors bring in interactions with each other. Hence, I will not focus on the categories per se, but on the content of the categories, focusing on what the actors mean in defining the "other" as different or same.

In understanding the perceptions of actors, it is important to stress certain aspects of the context of the study, which I believe are essential in understanding the statements of the teachers. In Komvux, roughly 60% of the students are immigrants, and in the folk high school, about 30%. Despite the multiculturality of the student body, both schools have no policy on how to meet the challenges presented by such multiculturality. In addition, during my fieldwork, the multicultural nature of the students and its impact on the educational activities in the two school was not an issue. In other words, it was not discussed by the teachers in the formal set-

ting. All the teachers interviewed, however, noted that they occasionally did have informal discussions and exchanged experiences in teaching classes that consisted entirely of, or were dominated by immigrants. These issues and concerns are, therefore, not part of the discursive practices of the schools or the institutions investigated, particularly in mixed classes, in classes where there were no immigrants or where there are very few of them. It is within this context or backdrop that the remarks and statements of the actors should be taken into account.

The teachers: the "other" as a "cultural" difference and a problem

What frame of reference do the teachers interviewed in this study bring to their encounters with the "other". In Komvux and the folk high school, I interviewed 7 teachers, and in these interviews an interesting pattern emerged; culture/ethnicity is not salient. It is explicit that the "other" is defined not only as different but also as a problem because of their cultural difference. In other words, their cultural difference is identified with, or perceived as, a problem. But as I pointed out in chapter 5, it is a specific group that is defined as culturally different and a problem in this talk.

But what are these problems and are they cultural? In the following statements the teachers identified the following problems in working with the "other: a) the "other" is disruptive or undisciplined, b) the "other" is passive, c) the "other" is dishonest and d) language differences are a problem. The language problem is very complex and I will deal with it in a separate section later on in this chapter.

> I: What are your experiences of teaching multicultural classes?
>
> What can I say, I think it is interesting, I think so, to have people from different backgrounds in the classroom. But at the same time it is difficult, because they come with different frames of reference. (Teacher [F])
>
> I: What do you mean, can you be precise, with what you mean with very different frames of reference?
>
> They think differently, you know. They come from different cultural backgrounds. For example, their view of the teacher, they expect to be spoon-fed, for me to tell them what to do. (Teacher [K])

> In addition, if their Swedish is not good, it can be difficult for them to actively participate in class discussions. It can also be because they have a different view of the teacher's role in the classroom. The teacher is an authority, they expect to be ordered, to be told what to do. It is difficult. In addition, as a teacher one does not know if what they say is what they think, it feels so. But when it comes to the Swedes, it does not feel so, it is easy to detect if they, for example, pretend to be something that they are not in order to satisfy or please me as a teacher, because we have the same frame of reference. (Teacher [F])

A similar view of immigrant students is also evident in the following statement by another teacher.

> It is difficult to manage different cultures from the perspective of the school. I do not mean music, food etc., but how one works in a school. The values that underlie the educational system are different in different countries. For example, I mean copying and then they say: "No I did not copy." But one can see that it is written in perfect Swedish, every word. (Teacher [K])
>
> I: Do you mean that they memorise and reproduce a text?
>
> Partly they can do that and partly they cheat. I cannot say this behaviour is cultural. Naturally they want to complete the program quickly, and their Swedish is poor. I think that most of them feel humiliated to go back to school at this level, when they have probably studied at university level in their country of origin ... (Teacher [K])
>
> The mixture of different nationalities, I did not have this problem 20 or 25 years ago, I only had Swedish students. It is only in the last few years that I have had students from different cultural backgrounds. Before there were one or two students in the class, but now we have many students from different cultures, and teaching becomes difficult when you have students from different cultures and languages. (Teacher [K])
>
> I: Can you be a little more specific with what you mean that it is difficult teaching multicultural classes?
>
> For example, they want to be taught in a traditional way – they want me to stand there and teach them. The teacher in their country is an authority, but it is not like that in Sweden. Disciplinary things such as coming late to school, not paying attention, and if there are many students from the same

> country, they sit together. It can be a problem. They can be noisy, talking to each other in their language. (Teacher [K])

The main concern and focus of the teachers in the above statements is the work habits of the students and, in the final analysis, how to maintain the normative order of the school. In brief what the teachers are describing are characteristic of a poor student. But what is important in this context is that these concerns or problems are located in the "culture(s)" of the "other". For example, implicit in the last statement are cultural assumptions of the "other" that are reflected in statements such as "not coming on time", a stereotypical behaviour that is commonly associated with the "other" and not with the typical "Swede". The same action or characteristics described above by the teachers, if manifested by the "native" students, are not lodged in the "culture" of these students, but are instead attributed to the social situation of the students as is evident below:

> Then you have Swedes who are fluent in the language, but have difficult social problems and are often absent, and have difficulty in concentrating on their work here. (Teacher [F])

This different definition of similar situations or actions, I believe, is a consequence of the pre-interaction frame of reference the actors, particularly the natives, bring in their interaction with the "other", which boils down to the sedimented perception of the "other" as culturally different. This, in turn, is based on the perception of culture as immutable, and which determine attitudes. But as I also stressed in chapter 2 it is based on an understanding of culture as static. The consequence of this perspective is that the action of the "other" is accepted or rejected as part of a culture and is similarly excused on that basis.

This perception of the "other" as different is not limited to the talk. It also affects (see chapter 3) the recruitment praxis of the folk high school. According to the teachers, the school limits the number of immigrants to 30%, and this is due to: a) the need to provide immigrant students with the opportunity to socialise with the natives, b) to provide them with an opportunity to practise Swedish – meaning that these students in their day-to-day life have little or no contact with the majority group and culture, and c) for these students to feel that they are in a Swedish school. Similarly, a Komvux teacher also pointed out to me that it was essential for immigrants to learn the Swedish way of doing things, and Swedish culture. In addition, the national curriculum of Komvux, particu-

larly in the SFI programme, emphasises that immigrants need to learn about the Swedish society and its values, but in doing so the school must respect the "cultures" of the "other". Hence, in interpreting the action or attitudes of the "other", the difference that counts and which the teachers bring in their encounter with the "other" is the perception that the "other", is different from the "norm" because of their culture. *Difference is their cultural identity.*

One can easily construe from the statements of the teachers that unruly and disorderly behaviour is uniquely an immigrant problem. In fact in all the time I was in the school, I have only seen Claudia leaving the class twice, Amineh 3 times and Ali none. Tim, on the other hand, averaged 3 times per lesson, while Gunilla and Josephine once per lesson. In Komvux, however, a typical disruptive behaviour is coming late to class, and this is common among all the students.

> I have never seen such a rude group of people in my life. They come in and go as they want. They have no respect. They come and go as they wish, they are inconsiderate to other students. (Teacher [F])
>
> I: Do they all do that?
>
> Not all, but mostly Tim, Josephine, and Gunilla. I think it is both embarrassing for me and the person, to tell them. They are, after all, adults, they should know that one does not just leave the class without asking for permission or saying where they are going. (Teacher [F])
>
> I think it is difficult. What can one do, shout at an adult person. One must take responsibility and consider others, I think. (Teacher [K])

A second major problem in Komvux is the rate of absence among the non-native students. Compared to the native student the rate of absence among non-native students was relatively high. Four (33%) of the non-native students attended less than 50% of the time allocated for the English programme; the rates of absence in the maths and social science class were insignificant. Four (33%) out of the 12 immigrant students in the English class dropped out of the programme compared to one native student. In the maths class none of the students dropped out of the programme, whereas in the social science class only one native student dropped out of the programme and none of the non-natives. It is important to stress that this information was collected for only those students that

attended the three courses, or two of the three courses, and does not reflect the rate of absence of the rest of the "native" and "non-native" students that attended the maths, and social science courses, and not the English class.

Although the teachers were dissatisfied with the behaviour of the students irrespective of their ethnicity, they generally chose to ignore it. This was a conscious choice by the teachers in both Komvux and the folk high school, as was apparent in the statements below. In other words, in constructing their role they did not see disciplining adult students as part of it. Implicit in their role definition is not only a construction of adulthoodness, but also a perception that adult students want to learn and are motivated in enrolling in the two schools, as is explicit in their statements above.

The passiveness of immigrants in the schools is similarly constructed, not only as a problem, but also located in the "cultures" of the other. But the problem is also common among the native students, as is apparent below in the teacher's statements and my observation of classroom interaction below.

> I have talked to Maria that she is passive in group work. She said that she becomes stressed and nervous in group work. She thinks that the other students are more capable than her. She is very slow. Maria needs a lot of individual help. Amineh was very quiet at the beginning, but has improved a lot in the class. (Teacher [F])

I came into the class about two or so minutes late. The teacher was already there and writing the names of the different political parties in Sweden. I sat down and turned my attention on what the students were doing while the teacher wrote on the blackboard. Martin, Peter, and one or two other students were taking notes or copying what the teacher wrote on board, whereas Claudia, Anette, Amineh, Ali, Gunilla were not taking any notes, but were staring at their books or pretending to be busy. Gunilla was doing her Swedish work in the history class. When the teacher completed what he was doing, he turned to the class and asked them:

> Teacher: "What did you learn yesterday?"
>
> Class: Silent for a few seconds, and Per said: "The advantages of working in a group."
>
> Teacher: "You also, I heard, discussed about the climate in the class."
>
> The class murmured "Yes".

Teacher: "Anybody wants to say anything?"

Class: Silent.

Teacher: "Peter, what do you think?"

Peter: "That the most important thing is that we should respect one another."

Teacher: "Anybody else?"

Class: Silent.

Teacher: "Then let's go to today's lesson. Today we will work with political ideologies. I want questions and your thoughts about this topic" (the students were already given the material for the lesson).

The Class was silent and the teacher after a few second said: "If you have no questions, then I will ask you some." At this point Peter, Ali, and Martin asked questions.

The above pattern of interaction is common in both schools. But what is important in this context is that the majority of the students irrespective of ethnic or cultural background are reluctant to participate actively in classroom interactions and discussions, as is explicit in the above monologue by the teacher.

The students

The natives and the non-natives attribute different reasons for their passiveness. There are, however, certain similarities across the two groups. In their statements, below, native students attribute their passiveness to: (1) the perception of the classroom situation as potentially threatening. This fear has nothing to do with the students' ability or intellect, as is evident in the comments by Lotta and John. To be active in the class, for them, involves taking risks, which they choose not to take, (2) lack of structure in the teaching, or more precisely their perception of how a teacher should teach. All the students interviewed associated teaching with structure as shown in the case of Alex, John and to certain degree Claudia (see chapter 7 also).

I: Why are you not active in the class, you rarely contribute in the class discussions or ask questions?

What do you mean? (Lotta)

I: You rarely ask questions in the class, or contribute in the class discussions?

I don't dare say anything in the class, and I don't think others dare do so either, we listen instead. (Lotta [F])

I: Why?

It is the fear that someone will think "God what an idiot you are," to be laughed at. I try to concentrate not opening my mouth.

When the teacher talks, you keep your mouth shut. It is true. You don't want to show the teacher that you don't understand. You don't want to be seen as an idiot. (John [K])

You know what, it is talk, talk all the time about the same thing. The English teacher is, I think, is not good. I have difficulty in writing in English. English grammar is difficult. I don't know when I am wrong. She (meaning the teacher) must tell me, but she does not do that, that is why you become tired and don't give a damn about the English class. (Alex [K])

I do not know what I am doing here, I do not have a choice. It is either here or sitting at home. There are no jobs today and it is too late for me to get an education. (Madde [K])

I: Why do you think that it is too late for you get an education?

I am nearly 40, with practically no education, it is too late to start on something new.

If I get a job today, I will not stay here for a minute. (Karin [K])

Madde and Karin above, however, believe that they are too old to get an education and a new profession. Hence, passiveness is not due to lack of motivation as such but depends on how they define their social situation, particularly their age in relation to the school, and the demands of the labour market. Both view the school a temporary refuge until they find work, or employment.

Similarly, with the exception of Zlata and Duniya, all the non-native students I interviewed in both Komvux and the folk high school seemed indifferent to the academic aspect of their school life in the two schools investigated. Alex (see also the portraits) is in Komvux to improve his Swedish language, Claudia, as is evident from her statement, is not interested in school, but views it as a

temporary situation, or refuge, until she finds work. Hence, both put as little effort as possible into their academic work. Alex prioritises his hobby and his social life, and Claudia the social aspect of the school (see also the portraits). Like the majority of the natives, some of the non-native students see the school as a temporary refuge, a place to wait for better economic times.

But unlike the natives students, they do not see or perceive that better economic times would automatically mean employment for them, due to their immigrant identity, or due to what they perceive as a widespread discrimination of immigrants in the labour market. Hence, their indifference to their school life, as revealed in their statements below, is closely related to: a) their perception of their subjective position as immigrants, b) their lack of positive role models, c) their age, and d) the non-recognition of their educational background and experiences.

> I am wasting my time here. (Ahmed [F])
>
> I: Why do you think that you are wasting your time?
>
> Do you think I am going to get a job. I have lived in Sweden for the last 6 years. This is the only way for me to support myself. It is this or the social welfare.
>
> I: Claudia, I rarely see you ask the teacher any question, and you do not do your home work most of the time. What are your reasons for relating to the school work in this way?
>
> Once or twice, the teachers gave me some homework, but I told the teacher that I was not interested. I want to quit school and do something else. (Claudia [K])

She adds:

> On Friday it is over. I have to think about what I will do. In fact I started to think about what I will do 6 months ago. It is not easy. I know I will go to the job centre, but I know there is nothing for me. I have no chance, Swedes come first.
>
> I don't want to continue; if I get a job today, I will leave. The school is a place to wait until you get something, a job. Times are bad now. What can I do? Sit at home? (Claudio [K])

Implicitly, what the above students are saying is that it makes no difference even if they make it in the system (school) they will not make it "out there", because they are immigrants, or they are too old or a combination of both, as in the case of Claudia above (see

also Claudia's portrait, chapter 7). Therefore, there is no point in working hard. Their behaviour and attitude towards the school is, therefore, closely related to how they define their social situation as "immigrants" or the "other", and what it means socially.

The teachers, and the society, on the other hand, tell these students that if they work hard and learn the language they will make it not only in the school, but also in the society. This message does not reflect their reality as they perceive it. Consequently, the prejudice and discriminations that these students face in their day-to-day life, as is evident in Claudia's statement, for example, are ignored or minimised. Their passiveness and indifference, in the final analysis, can be attributed to their definition of their social reality and which in turn is closely related to their perception of their subjective position in the schema of social relations in Sweden today, which they use to define and construct their reality(ies) in the two schools studied.

The "native" students: the "other" as culturally different and a problem

As both a researcher and an immigrant, it was not easy for me to elicit the frame of reference the native students operated with in relation to the "other". I described my marginalisation and my attempts to break from it in chapter 3 and in my reflections. Hence, in order to get to uncover their perception, I chose to focus, in the interviews, on the nature of the social interaction – the lack of interaction in and outside the class between the natives and the immigrant students in both schools.

In the following statements, Katarina, and John raise a number of issues which they define as problems in relating to the "other", and these are: a) differences in values, b) differences in lifestyle, c) differences in ways of thinking, and d) differences in language. As pointed out earlier, I will deal with the issue of language in a separate section in this chapter.

> I: Katarina, in the school there are many students from different countries, do you socialise with them in or outside the school?
>
> I don't socialise with any students in the school. Immigrants, I don't really know any. I live in the countryside, there are no immigrants there. I think it is all about cultural differences, ways of thinking, how they perceive women, all these make

one careful about socialising with immigrants. You don't want problems. (Katarina [F])

I: What do you mean by "you don't want problems?"

Misunderstanding each other, you know. It's problematic, when you are from different cultures.

One is probably scared. (John [K])

I: Scared of what?

I don't know. What do you think?

I: What do you think yourself?

I have been thinking about this, it is not only here (in the school) it is everywhere, even on the bus, it is ridiculous. I think it is because ... you always hear bad things about immigrants. It is ... I think because of that and their culture.

I: What do you mean by their culture?

Their view of women for example.

I: Do you socialise with any students in and outside the school?

In maths I sit with two guys from Somalia, they are really good guys and are good at maths. I spend much time with them in school, but not outside school. I have other friends.

In defining the other as different and a problem, it is evident in the statement of the above students that the Swedish "culture" is used as a norm and taken for granted, homogenised and essentialised, whereas the "cultures" of the "other" are constructed as different and are similarly homogenised and essentialised but in relation to the "norm". This essentialisation of difference suggests that "cultures" and cultural identities are static, and are an unchanging condition, but, more importantly, it determines attitudes and a way of thinking as is obvious in the statements by Katarina and John.

The view of the "other" as different and a social problem is common among all the students I interviewed in both Komvux and the folk high school, with the exception of Anette in the folk high school, as can be seen in her statement below.

One of the stupidest things we do as human beings, irrespective of religious difference and such things, is that we try

> not to get to know each other. If I see a person like Claudia, I do not try to approach her, because I think she might think I am imposing myself on her. Then I do not get to know her and she does not get to know me, because she does not try to get to know me either

However, none of the students I interviewed mentioned or identified concrete incidents or actions of the "other" that can be typified as a the result of cultural difference etc., or conflict over values. In the case of the native actors, the difference that is significant is *cultural identity* in their encounter with the "other".

Difference are attitudes/experiences

Zlata, Alex, Claudio, and Mohamed, below, do not perceive the native students as a cultural problem. In their statements they experience the natives as hostile to them, and they point to their marginalisation in the school etc., as a consequence of the hostility of the native students.

> I: I rarely see you work with Malin, John, Lisa, why?
>
> They sit there and we sit here. They don't talk to us and we do not talk to them. They have a bad conception about us.
>
> I: What do you mean by us?
>
> Immigrants. (Zlata [K])

Then she narrates the following story to illustrate her point:

> Do you know what happened to us when we got our first apartment? A man and a women from the Immigration Office came to the apartment and showed us how the electrical cooker worked. They think we are so primitive. I do not understand that.
>
> Have you seen an elephant and a lion walk together, it is impossible, it is nature. We have brains and language, we can agree, how to act, but when we do not know each other, we become like animals, each one goes to his own kind. You sense that you are not welcome in the group. When you say something, they look at each other and laugh. When I say something in my own way, that is not fun. (Alex [K])

The following (informal) conversation with an immigrant student in the folk high school illustrates the same point. A similar perception of the "native" is also apparent in the statements of Claudio below.

> I: Hi Mohammed, how are you today?
>
> I am okay. It is very difficult to learn Swedish in this school.
>
> I: Why do you think so?
>
> There is nobody to talk Swedish with in and outside the school, and I cannot speak Swedish with my countrymen.
>
> I: Don't you have any Swedish friends outside the school?
>
> No, I don't.
>
> I: But nearly half of your classmates are Swedish.
>
> But they don't want to talk to us.
>
> I: Have you tried to talk to them?
>
> No.
>
> I: Then how do you know that they don't want to talk to you?
>
> You know ... You feel it. When you sit with them, they talk to each other, you are not welcome ... you just feel it.
>
> They don't want to have any contact with us, and we immigrants can't always be the ones who make the first contact. (Claudio [K])

Zlata in her statements (see p. 132) narrates her encounter with the natives and her experience of these encounters. In her narrative she emphasises that the native actors perceive immigrants as a social problem, illiterate and incapable of functioning in a literate and technologically advanced society like Sweden. Apparent also in her statement below is the perception that natives generally view immigrants as a homogeneous group, with similar experiences irrespective of their background, etc. But it is also evident in the statement that Zlata rejects or resists the attempt to define her as part of a homogenised entity, culturally, ethnically, etc., but more importantly, what she rejects is not the labelling, cultural or otherwise per se, but the stigmatisation explicit and implicit in constructing her as the cultural "other".

> We think there is a need for knowledge in Sweden. They know very little about immigrants. For example, we come from ex-Yugoslavia, but we come from different parts of Yugoslavia, from Bosnia, Serbia, etc. We come from different towns, different cultures. They know Kosovo Albanians, and they think that we are all the same, I don't like that. We have different lifestyles. (Zlata [student])

In other words, Zlata rejects the cultural deficit discourse that the natives seem to operate with in interacting with the "other". She attempts to distance herself from this conception of immigrants. This perception is common among all the native students interviewed in both schools. Hence, what is important is not the categories in use per se, but the social meanings and importance imbedded in the categories that are used in defining the "other" not simply as different but as a problem. For example, the manner in which the other is typified and talked about has a consequence on how these (immigrants) students construct their reality as illustrated by the following comment of a student in Komvux.

> If, for example, we want to achieve a goal, the same goal as a "Swedish man or woman" we have to prove that we know more than they know to achieve the same goal. (Student [K])

In the above comment, it is clear that this student has constructed or defined her reality in relation to the "Swede", and in the process their reality in relation to the social institutions in the society, in this case the school. Whether this definition is right or wrong is irrelevant. She believes, as many of the students I interviewed formally or informally, that they are not getting a fair deal. Not because they lack ability, but due to the widespread negative perception about them. Just like the native students, immigrant students operate with an incipient abstraction of the native students, and this informs their action in relation to the "other". These abstractions are not based on actual contact or interaction but are abstractions constructed from the social or public discourse about the nature of social relations in multicultural Sweden. Such mutual suspicion is also apparent in the following interchange between the actors in the folk high school. The teacher said:

> If you were Prime minister for a month, what would you do?
>
> I would send all immigrants back to their countries. (Swedish student)

The above comment seemed to catch the teacher and students off guard, and for a few seconds there was total silence in the class. You could hear a pin drop. Then the teacher said, "Next." Sitting next to this student was an immigrant student from Latin America and he said:

> If I was Prime Minister for one month, I would put all racists in jail.

Again the class and the teacher were silent for a few seconds. The most telling aspect in this interchange was the shock and the pregnant silence that followed it. After the class I asked the two students what they meant by their comments in the class. The Swedish student replied to my question reproducing the common catalogue of problems associated with "immigrants": "immigrants" are basically a social burden on "Swedish" society. That is, they sell drugs to Swedish youngsters, they are welfare dependants, they do not want to adapt to our way of life or culture etc. The immigrant student, in turn, told me that he could not let a racist comment directed at him go by without saying something. He took the comment by the student as a personal affront to him as an immigrant, typified the "other" as a "racist" and anti-immigrant, and hence, was hostile to him.

The above students shared with the class their perspective about a social reality. Whether it is right or wrong is irrelevant, or whether this was a racist comment or not is debatable. It is obvious that the native student in this interaction has a negative perception of the "other" that she brings into her interaction with the "other".

What is interesting, however, in the above exchange, and which I believe is relevant in this context, is the reaction of the teacher. She ignored the comments of the students. By not taking up the issue raised by them, she may inadvertently have been perceived (by the other) as harbouring the same sentiments or attitude vis-à-vis the "other" or vice versa. She also lets a golden opportunity pass to open up a discussion on a sensitive issue, particularly as the school policy emphasises building bridges and tolerance between cultures and groups in the school and society. In the final analysis, it is apparent in the above description, for the non-native student, the differences that count and which they bring into their interaction with the "natives" and the schools are differences related to their subjective positions, and experiences of marginalisation, discrimination/racism, etc., both imagined and real.

Language differences as a problem

Language, like culture, is at the heart of multicultural debate in many multicultural societies. In Sweden, the language debate has generally focused on the merits of home language training and its importance in the acquisition of a second language, in this case Swedish. Irrespective of the language debate, the teachers interviewed in Komvux and the folk high school explicitly singled out the language of instruction (Swedish) as a problem in teaching multilingual classes. In their comments, they raised two issues or problems vis-à-vis the language of instruction. First, the Swedish language as an identity marker. Second, the language of instruction as an obstacle to communication and interaction. Language as an identity marker is discussed in the introduction, therefore in this section I will focus on the second aspect – language as an obstacle to communication and interaction.

All the teachers I interviewed in both schools emphasised that the poor ability of immigrants in Swedish makes it difficult for these students to participate in class activities. In addition, they pointed out that the performance of immigrants in the schools or the programmes in the two schools depends on their mastery of Swedish.

> Some immigrants have poor language ability in Swedish, and they have difficulty in following what I say in class. If I write on the blackboard, it is relatively easy for them to understand it. They also, sometimes, have difficulty in working independently, expressing themselves, reading and summarising. Then you have the Swedes, they have control over the language, but have a difficult social situation, which is often the reason for their high rate of absence. (Teacher [F])

> The performance of immigrant students, especially how fast they learn Swedish and perform, depends on the educational background and their mother tongue. Some groups of immigrants have a very different language from Swedish and have difficulties in learning and mastering the Swedish language than students who speak English or German for example. (Teacher [K])

> ... in the last few years we have had many students from different cultures, and teaching becomes difficult, they have different language backgrounds. As a language teacher this is the problem I see clearly. The other aspect is the smooth functioning of the social life in the class, with different languages. Depending on their mother tongue, different alphabets, it becomes difficult for the students to work in a group if they are

> very different from one another. Some native students say that it is difficult to understand what students from other language background say. (Teacher [K])

Apart from the problem of communication identified above, in the second comment, the teacher brings up an interesting issue – the ability of immigrants to master Swedish is said to depend on the level or educational background of immigrants. What is interesting in this comment is that the teacher takes for granted the presence of educated immigrants at this level in the school as a normal state of affairs, or at least it is not questioned. In the basic adult education programme, as I pointed out implicitly and explicitly in the description of the context of the study, the educational background of immigrant students is ignored in the process of banding or grouping the students in both the municipal adult education centre (Komvux) and the folk high school.

Consequently, the language problem is viewed as a problem of diversity. The main concern of the teachers in both Komvux and the folk high school is, therefore, how to deal with students with diverse linguistic and educational backgrounds, but also different ability in Swedish (the language of instruction). The focus or the reaction of the system so far has been on how to integrate immigrants in the system, and not how these student should be taught and experience educational equity. However, it is important to emphasise that the teachers interviewed do not view or see themselves as Swedish language teachers. They expect that all immigrant students at this level or programme have completed the SFI (Swedish as a second language) programme and as a result are expected to have the necessary language skills (in Swedish) to pursue their studies at this level in both schools. In other words, they do not see the language "problem" as their problem.

By defining the problem as a didactic challenge and by taking the language of instruction as given, the teachers sidestep a critical analysis of the medium of instruction in this context. Hence, other alternative solutions and experimentations are not taken into consideration. In addition, the presence of educated immigrants at this level (in Komvux in particular) and their failure or poor performance can easily be explained and justified as the result of their language ability in Swedish.

It is important to point out that the use of the Swedish language as a medium of instruction in this context is not solely a technical decision; it is a political decision which is beyond the authority of the teachers in both schools. In multicultural Sweden, the cause and

explanation of the marginalisation of immigrants is attributed to their language ability in Swedish, and the recent integration policy in this area calls for strengthening the Swedish language in schools, particularly in areas were immigrants are the dominant group. The discourse in this context calls for more Swedish language; hence, it structures the thinking in this area and praxis, in the process negating a different discourse that problematises and critically examines the current focus on the Swedish language as the magic wand to solve the issues in this context. More importantly it serves to negate alternative praxis, experimentation and creative solutions.

Summary and discussion

In this section I will attempt to summarise the main points and discuss them using relevant literature in this area. The students and the teachers identified a number of issues which they defined or constructed as a problem in working and interacting with each other. In the above description the encounter between natives and non-natives in both schools is coloured by a common and shared perspective that the "other" is different and a problem and that this is due to their cultural identity. This sedimented pre-interaction attitude is used as a veil to understand and make sense of the actions, attitudes etc. of the "other". For instance, the working habits of these students is culturalised, while a similar attitude vis-à-vis the natives is associated or linked to their social situation. The native students similarly conceive the "other" as different and a problem to work or interact with due to their world view, life style and, in the final analysis, their "culture".

Moreover, the natives perceive the actions/attitudes of the "other" as a function or determined by their culture, while they do not view their action or attitude as a function of a culture. Hence, the culture of the "other" is problematised, and the "Swedish culture" is not. In addition, the experiences of the "other" is collectivise. For example, the apparent perception that women in this group are oppressed, and men in this group are implicitly the oppressors.

The interchange between the immigrant and the native students in the folk high school described above also shows the paradox and problems of the constructions of the "other" as different or the social construction of difference in this context. The "other" in the perspective of the student is associated with social problems such as criminality, social welfare dependency, or are defined as parasites,

while in a similar fashion the non-native student explicitly and implicitly defines the native student as a racist or prejudiced. Consequently, the non-native students similarly homogenise and define all natives as prejudiced or potentially hostile towards "immigrants" and, as is evident in their statements, thus legitimises or is used as an excuse to marginalise the "native" students, but also to define their reality in the two schools as significant or insignificant to their social reality. In general it is, however, important to stress that the native students and teachers operate with a notion of cultural identity as a problem, while the non-natives tend to depart from the specificity of their social position as immigrants, i.e. their subjective position as immigrants and differential experiences as a consequence of their identity.

Hence, the culturalist discourse evident in the "native" talk can be used to construe social problems that are said to afflict the "other", their actions/attitudes, and their ability. But it can also be used to explain the marginalisation or segregation of the "other", and the actions of the individual. Hence, as an analytical tool, the concept of "culture" as implied also in chapter 5 is, and can be, used in this context to mean anything. Woods (1983) rightly points out:

> People do not see one objective reality with a universal template. Rather, their views of realities are through a screen, or an interpretational code which they employ to understand the world. These perspectives assist in defining the situation and identifying and locating the "other" (pp. 7-8).

It is apparent in the above description and summation that the "other" is defined as culturally different and a problem. This social construction of the "other" is common in the social discourse of the "other" and multiculturalism in Sweden but also in many European countries. Scrierup (1995, p. 14) writes:

> One among the critical pioneers was the Indian Norwegian researcher, Sunil Loona, who in 1986, at VII Nordic seminar for migration research, described social research on ethnic relations as an academic "ghetto", exclusively depicting the relationship between ethnic minorities and the majorities as a matter of culture. This outspoken "culturalism" of the "ethnicity researcher", says Loona, generates a basis for a stigmatising pointing out of immigrant minority groups, while a critical scrutiny of the power relationship in society and following this, a perspective for change of discriminating institutional practices are lost out of sight (p. 14).

This "culturalist" discourse of the "other", therefore, has become the common social stock of knowledge available to all, as was apparent in the students' and teachers' frame of reference above and the political debate in this area as stated in a debate article by five conservative politicians.

> The most important reason for the difficulty in integrating these people (immigrants) into the Swedish labour market is that they lack the sociocultural competence which is necessary in the labour market of a developed country (DN, April 12, 1997).

Implicit in the above statements is that certain groups of immigrants – the non-European immigrants – will always be problem and cannot be integrated in the social fabric of the Swedish work life because of their cultural background or identity. Culturalist discourse, therefore, functions according to Tesfahuney (1998) to differentiate and racialise immigrants. Simply put, an important dimension of culture in the multicultural discourse is the racialisation of culture.

> ... the undertext of the racialisation of migration would read: immigrants from Europe or the West bear the "right" colour and culture, the differences are so minute as to be inconsequential for social and cultural integration. These narratives racialise the notion of threat, and immigrants with the "wrong" racial traits ipso facto become invested with danger and problems. Conversely, migrants with the "right" colour are disinvested from danger and thus pose no threat (p. 38).

More importantly, the use of "cultural" discourse detaches culture from social processes, economic or institutional etc., that bring about the marginalisation of the "other", and the creation of cultural boundaries.

In the encounter, all the actors stressed language, or to be precise, the ability of the non-native student to speak Swedish as a problem. But it is also evident that the language in this context has many aspects. Language can be used to describe ethnic and cultural belonging or groups, but it can also impacts positively or negatively the social interactions between the different language groups as evident in the statements of the students and the educational achievent of the non-native students as is evident in the statements of the teachers and the student in this chapter. In her article: *Discourses on cultural differences: the case of schooling,* Moldenhawer emphasises that:

> It is taken for granted that, rather than having problems in schools, ethnic minority pupils are a problem for the schools, because they do not speak Danish properly and have furthermore been socialised in a culture different from the dominant one (p. 1).

This perception of the "other" informs the encounter between the "other" and the natives. But the problems faced by the "other" in Sweden are often described as, or reduced to, language and culture. This cultural/linguistic reductionist perspective or frame of reference is evident in the statement of the actors, particularly the natives. Further, it is used to legitimise more Swedish language programmes for immigrants, as against bilingualism and mother tongue education, and is used to justify the social situation of immigrants in Sweden today.

Chapter 7

Student portraits

In chapter five, I described the different typing categories the actors in the two schools use in making sense of the multicultural social context of the school. In chapter six, I focused on the content and meaning of the categories the actors in the two schools operate with and which form the frame of reference they bring in interacting with the "other". In the following chapter, I will present 8 portraits of the students, four from each school. In these portraits I will emphasise the students' constructions of their reality in the two schools and their possible effect on school life in Komvux and the folk high school. But before I present the student portraits, it is important to describe who these students are, what they have in common and how they differ from each other.

The adult students and their baggage

The students in the folk high school and Komvux share a number of characteristics. For example, the majority of the students are female in both schools, but there are differences in terms of age between the students in the two schools. For instance, the majority of the students in Komvux are in their late 20s, while in the folk high school, the majority of the student are in their mid-30s, and early 40s. In addition, the majority of the students are primary school drop-outs, with the exception of Mia, Anders, and Lena, in the folk high school, who are secondary school drop-outs, but all these students are in their early 20s. Similarly, Zahra, Per, Omar in Komvux are secondary school drop-outs and also in the same age brackets or are in their early and mid-20s.

The majority of the students in both schools also have children or families. But there are subtle differences between the native and non-native students. The majority of the native students in the class/programme studied in both schools are single mother/fathers, while this is not the case for the non-native students. However, despite this difference, all the students interviewed in both contexts emphasised that they have to juggle their time to meet the demands of the school and family life, and they tended to prioritise their family at the expense of their school life.

In both schools, the majority of the native students, unlike the non-native students, had long working careers before they enrolled in Komvux or the folk high school. There are exceptions even in this case. For example, Anette and Anders, in the folk high school, had no working life experience. But unlike the majority of their class mates, they are in their early 20s and have barely started their working life or careers. On the other hand, Claudia and Amineh (in the folk high school) had relatively long working careers, while in Komvux, all the non-native students I interviewed, apart from Claudio, had no experience of working in Sweden. It is, however, important to stress that all the non-native students who had a career prior to enrolling in the two schools had lived in Sweden for nearly 10 years or more and like the native students enrolled in adult education because they became unemployed.

All these factors have important bearings on the students' definition of their realities in the school. The initial encounters for these students are not a start of a school career, but involves going back to school. Consequently, they come to the two systems with their past educational baggages, and have to define themselves in relation to the other students and the school. In other words, it involves a self-presentation or a definition of who they are, i.e. it involves how these students define their identities etc.

John

John is a young man in his early 20s. His family owns and operates a medium-size transportation company. Although his parent are not well educated they are, however, economically well-to-do. John completed his primary education, but because of his poor primary grades he could only enrol in secondary technical programme. After only one year he dropped out of the programme because he was not interested in technical studies and was generally tired of school life as he states below.

> I dropped out of secondary school because I was tired of school, and I was not interested in technical education.
>
> I: What did you know about Komvux before you started studying in Komvux?
>
> In an ITS course organised by the job centre. It was a secondary preparatory course. After the course I applied to the school.
>
> I: Did you know anything about Komvux before ...

> Not much. I have some friends who studied in Komvux, and they though it was a tough, but good, school.

John has no professional training but has worked in different types of job. For example, he worked as a cleaner in his father's company for about a year; in a printing shop for four years, and finally in a youth centre for six months. He was unemployed for one year, when he was offered a course organised by the job centre. After this course he enrolled in Komvux. Many of the native students like John and some non-native students were recruited directly or indirectly to Komvux through orientation courses organised by the job centre.

What is Komvux for John?

What does enrolling in Komvux mean for John? First I have to stress that it is not easy to determine what the school means for John. In the following statements, John gives two reasons for attending Komvux: (a) to improve his primary school grades, (b) to establish some structure in what he perceived was a life style without a social meaning. In other words, he was tired of sitting at home doing nothing.

> I: What do you want to achieve with your education in Komvux?
>
> I had to complete my primary education first, I have poor grades. I don't know what I want to be yet. I was also tired of sitting at home doing nothing. I want to work in my father's office. I will end up there anyway in the future.

But at the same time he also points out that he does not know what he wants to achieve with his education. That is, he has not yet decided on a career. It is also evident in his statement below that going to the school is not for meeting others or the social aspect or opportunity the school offers him.

> I: Do you socialise with any students from the school?
>
> I don't socialise with any of the students in the school outside school. I have other friends.

I believe that this vague definition of his school career in Komvux is closely linked to his definition of his social situation. John comes from an economically well-off family and as he comments above, he

believes that he will always have a place in the family business. Hence, his options in the labour market are not constrained by his participation and performance in Komvux, unlike many of his counterparts in Komvux, who believe that their future prospects (socio-economic status) would improve as a result of their education in Komvux. Therefore, from John's perspective, the school has little or no tangible material and social significance. Two weeks after the interview, John dropped out of the programme, due to his poor grades.

John and school life

John's construction of his reality in Komvux described above affects his attitude towards his school work, his interaction with the teachers, and the academic aspect of his school work. I observed John in a number of lessons. In the social science class John always sat in the same place; he was rarely late, or absent. But this does not mean that he was an active learner. During the classroom activities he rarely initiated interactions with teacher. He sat with his book open, pretending to be attentive. Most of the time he avoided eye contact with the teacher, leafing through his notebook when the teacher was around or near his desk, pretending to read or write. The moment the teachers passed by or was beyond his range of sight or attention, he stopped and started to converse with the student sitting next to him. He rarely did his homework, and on many occasions I noticed him copying it (homework) from other students who had done theirs. In other words, he did his utmost not to be seen, particularly by the teacher.

John also viewed the workload and the high pace of educational activities in Komvux not only as a problem, but also overwhelming. In other words, John is not committed enough to invest the necessary time to meet the challenges of studying in Komvux. He experiences these aspects of his educational life in Komvux as limiting and encroaching on his social life. In other words, the school activities were consuming more of his time than he expected. In chapter 4, I stressed that the culture of the school values and encourages independent work habits, discipline and active participation by the students to create their own educational programme to meet the students' educational or professional needs and goals. The teachers, in addition, viewed themselves not as teachers, but supervisors, helping students to achieve their goals.

In brief John's perspective of the teacher and his attitude are in contradiction, or clashes with the teacher's perspective of the adult

students and their definition of their role. Hence, the contextual reality of the school summarised above is defined by John as an obstacle rather than a possibility and is perceived as a reversal of teacher and student roles. That is, although he accepts the idea of a teacher, he does not accept the teachers' definition of their role, and the underpinning values and culture of the school. Hence, John's action, particularly his passiveness in classroom interaction, is intimately related to how he defines his social situation in relation to the school and his perspective of the role of the teacher or what it means to be a teacher.

> I: John, you have now been studying in the school for some months now, what are your experiences of studying in Komvux?
>
> There is a lot of homework, nearly everyday we have homework in all subjects. It is difficult. You do not have time to read or do other things. Sometimes you do not do it or only do some. It is not easy. Then there are all the tests. They all come at the same time. One wonders if the teachers are just out to make you suffer.
>
> I: John, but you have the possibility to influence your study situation in the school?
>
> I know, but it is not my job. I cannot do his job. A good teacher should know his work.
>
> I: What is a good teacher for you?
>
> ... one has to respect the teacher ... it is difficult. I mean, one must respect the teacher in his work. One did not do that in primary school, one did not show any respect. A good teacher should talk well, must be able to teach well. He should not complicate things. He should be hard but fair. He should not be apologetic. It is his job, he must be able to teach. My Swedish teacher is weak, nothing happens in the Swedish class ... nothing happens ... it is boring.

He adds:

> ... when the teacher talks you shut your mouth. It is true, one does that, I also do it. One does not want to show others that you do not understand what the teacher is saying. You do not want others to think that you are an idiot, particularly in Swedish and social science. Swedish is my language, and I should know it, but I do not, it is a difficult language, the most

difficult language in the world. Social science, I just do not like it.

John's strategy is to avoid work and, more importantly, not to be seen, or avoid the teachers' attention in classroom interactions. But he also views the teachers as experts in their respective subjects, and it is their job to present, and to structure their lessons clearly and preferably in a manageable method. In addition, to be active in the class, according to John, is risky, i.e. one can easily be humiliated and hence should be avoided if one can help it.

John and the "other"

John does not personally view the multicultural nature of the school as a problem. But like the majority of the natives interviewed he adheres to the notion that immigrants are different; they work and think differently, and this is due to their "culture". In addition, John points out this perception of the "other" as culturally different and thus a problem is common knowledge among the "natives". Hence, according to him, this is the main reason why "natives" distance themselves from the "other" – primarily to avoid conflict that might arise as a consequence of cultural misunderstanding, or cultural insensitivity towards the "other".

I: What are your experiences of studying in the school with people from different countries?

I think it is good. You learn a lot about how they work and think. I have not seen any conflicts, so far. I have not noticed anything, but I can only speak for myself. Many Swedes think that immigrants are difficult and prefer not to socialise with them. In maths I sit with two Somali students, they are very good guys, and good at maths.

I: Why do you think Swedes prefer not to socialise with immigrants?

They are probably afraid. I don't know. It is everybody's fault. One cannot only blame the Swedes. I have thought about this, it is not only in the school. It is everywhere. Even on the bus.

The paradox inherent in John's statement above is that the "other" is constructed to have "culture", and hence is a problem whereas the natives lack culture, and are not perceived as a problem. For example, he points out that: "One learns how they work and think," and this is a consequence of their culture. This paradox is based on

John's understanding of "culture" which in turn leads to defining the multicultural social situation and interactions across ethnicity/culture as potentially problematic or a potential threat to the Swedish culture and world view

Interpretation: The municipal adult education and John

In the above description, I stressed that John's construction is based partly on his definition of his social reality in the school and partly on his definition of the teachers' role and their expectation of the adult students. The school has little or no social and economic significance for John. On top of that, he enrolled in Komvux with no clear programme. All these factors strengthen his marginalisation, his constructions and his definition of his reality in the school.

For example, John prefers a teacher who tells him what to do, and how to do it. He is unable to cope with the pace, the workload and the constant regime of testing in the school. The teachers, on the other hand, expects the adult student to take control of their learning situation and the teachers' role is to supervise and guide the students. This contradiction in expectations and role definition is, in the final analysis, a clash of perspectives and a struggle over meaning, but is also an indication of the centrality and importance of students perception of their subjective position (identity) in relation to the school.

John's perception of the "cultural other" can be summed up as follows: the "other" is culturally different, and this difference is a problem to the natives. But as he points out, he personally does not see that as a problem. He adheres, however, to the notion that the "other" is culturally different, and that this can potentially cause conflicts.

Alex

Alex is a 26-year-old man from Iran. His father has a six-year educational background, and his mother is illiterate and a housewife. His family owned a small plot of land which they farmed. To complement their income his father worked as a part-time lorry driver. Alex completed his primary education in Iran. But his educational career was cut short by the Iran-Iraq war. Like many refugees and asylum seekers from Iran, he fled to Iraq to avoid military conscription. During the Gulf war, he fled to Jordan and was offered politi-

cal asylum in Sweden, through the United Nation refugee re-settlement programme.

Within two weeks of his arrival in the municipality, he was placed in the SFI (Swedish for immigrants) programme in Komvux. When he completed the programme, he enrolled in a vocational training centre in the municipality, commonly known as AMU. Like most refugees, Alex supports his family in Iran, with his meagre income, and he dropped out of this programme after a few months because of the financial constraints involved in studying in AMU. But, as he also points out, that he was not interested in the programme. For two years he neither worked nor went to school, until he enrolled in Komvux again.

What is Komvux for Alex?

Komvux, in its initial construction, was intended as a second-chance education, targeting low-educated adults. Its mandate is to offer adult students academic competency for further education, or qualifications for upgrading or retraining adult students for a new profession. In addition, in the last decade or so, the school also provides language training for immigrants, commonly known as the SFI programme. Alex completed the SFI in Komvux, prior to enrolling in AMU.

Alex gives three reasons for enrolling in Komvux for the second time: (a) The social opportunity the school offers him (many of his friend attend Komvux). (b) To improve his Swedish language skills, which he perceives as essential for his integration in the Swedish society. (c) To have some structure in his day-to-day life.

From his statement above, one can deduce that the school, for Alex, is not a springboard for further education or to attain a qualification for a specific competency for professional training. Instead, he perceives the school as a place to meet others.

> I: Why did you decide to study in Komvux?
>
> It was like this. I was tired of sitting at home doing nothing. I thought about enrolling in AMU, but it is boring there. So I decided on Komvux, because it is well known and a good school. But many of my friends are also studying in Komvux. I went to a student counsellor, and he asked me what I wanted to study, what my future plans were. Then he told me to apply. I applied and after some time I got a letter telling me when I was to start.

He adds:

> I am trying to improve my Swedish language skills, adapt to this society. It is difficult for immigrants, you know. The level of Swedish required for work or university education is very high, it is not easy, and I don't honestly think I will achieve the standard.
>
> I: What do you mean it is difficult for immigrants?
>
> It is difficult to get a job if you are an immigrant. I am not educated, but I know many people who are educated but do not have work. It is not easy, you know, for immigrants.

Alex, as is evident in his remark above, believes that even if he educates himself, it does not mean that he will get a job and this according to him, is due to his identity as an immigrant. This view is grounded on his perception of his "immigrant" identity and also involves a degree of abstraction and generalisation about the condition of the group defined as immigrants and their subjective position in the social relation in Sweden. In other words, he is not aware of success stories, or myths of success within his own ethnic group in Sweden, or within the group collectively defined as immigrants. Consequently, he sees no reason to invest time and energy in a project that he believes will not pay off.

Implicit in his comments is an understanding of not only his subject position as an immigrant, but also a generalisation or collectivisation of the experiences of collective immigrants. That is, from a constructionist perspective his action and perception is a consequence of an externalisation of intersubjective construction of the "other"; to be precise, the internalisation and externalisation of the social stock of knowledge of immigrants.

Alex: The school life in Komvux

Alex's action and attitude towards his school work and his interaction with the teacher is coloured by his construction of his reality in the school. That is, he perceives the school through his constructions of his subjective position as an immigrant and what that means socially. For instance, he notes that there is no point in working or studying hard because, as an immigrant, it does not matter really whether you are educated or not or what ability you have, you are not going to get a job anyway, simply because of your immigrant identity. Hence, there is no point in working hard. This

attitude towards the school is evident in his action in the class. For instance, in the English class Alex sits with Joseph, a fellow countryman, and when he is absent he either sits alone or with Zahra a young woman from Bosnia. In the maths class he sits with Maurice and Mayte.

In both classes, Alex and his friends are disruptive. They talk and laugh loudly, and on a number of occasions both the teachers and the students in the class were visibly irritated at their behaviour. One day, during the break, I asked him why he acted out in the class, and he replied that: "The teacher is wasting our time, she is not teaching us anything," meaning the English teacher. In addition, he rarely does his homework. On one occasion the teacher asked why he did not do his homework. He replied that he did not have time. His lack of interest in the classwork was obvious. However, the teachers generally ignored his behaviour, but on one occasion the English teacher irritatingly told them: "Write down the word we have been talking about, it might be useful to you."

They stopped talking, and wrote the words. At the end of one class, the teacher distributed the next lesson's homework. Alex murmured to his friend: "Homework, just homework. I am tired of it."

Alex's perspective of the teachers, in addition, tends to affect his attitude and interactions with them. For example, he labels the English teacher as incompetent and the maths teacher as competent, based on their teaching styles and definition of the teacher's role in the class. According to Alex, teachers should be able to teach. To him this means that they should have structure in their teaching; assign a text book, start with grammar, follow the text book systematically and constantly evaluate and test the students.

The English teacher, on the other hand, strictly followed the ideas of self-directed learning. According to the teacher, this method entails that the students pace their own learning and select their teaching material. The role of the teacher is that of a supervisor, i.e. to help the students, not only in planning their individual educational goals, but also in their learning as she states below.

> It is a struggle everyday. I give them freedom, but they don't take it. It is important for a teacher who works in this method to be convinced and not back down. Students who take the initiative, who ask when they do not understand and constantly use English in the class, who are open to others in the class are, from my perspective, active students.

In addition, Alex singles out the workload in the school as unreasonably heavy, and on top of that he finds the pace of learning to be high. The lack of structure does not make his life easy either, because, as is apparent in the teachers' construction of their role, Alex has to be active in planning his educational activities. But although Alex claims the workload in the school is unreasonably heavy, he spends less than two hours studying and doing his homework, making it difficult for him to catch up on his school work, which keeps on piling up.

> I: Alex, you seem to be uninterested in class. You do not do your homework, you rarely listen to the teacher's instruction, and so on, why?
>
> I do not write in Roman letters, I do not read in the same way. I have difficulty in adjusting to reading texts in Roman letters. I write from this side and they write from the other side, in a completely different language. That is why I have difficulty. The English teacher she nags and nags, and she gives stencils, only stencils. She is not a good teacher. In English we do not learn grammar, we have no book. It is only talk, it is a waste of time. The maths teacher is good.
>
> I: In what way is the maths teacher good?
>
> She really teaches, she tells us when we are doing well and when we are not, and she also shows us how to work.
>
> I: Can one say that it is the English teacher's way of teaching that you do not like?
>
> Yes, one can say that. If you have to be active in the class, then you have to read, and know it well. I can write a lot, and talk a lot, but I have no time. I begin at 8:00 in the morning and the school ends at 3:00 in the afternoon. I am single. When I get home I have to shower, cook, and eat. Then the time by then is 4:00. I begin training at about 5:00 until 7:00. When I get home I am tired, I shower, cook and eat. By that time it is 9:00, and I can then only do one homework, for example, English. The next day there is more homework, too. The pace is very high. The next day there is class and one has not read anything. It is difficult to be active.

Alex's relation to the English teacher in particular became a struggle over meanings and role definition, in addition to his perception of his subjective position as an immigrant in Sweden today that he brings in constructing his reality in relation to the school. The English teacher's understanding of her role and perspective was incom-

patible with Alex's understanding of the teacher's role. In other words, he does not see the distinction between his role as a student, and the teacher's role as a teacher. Hence, he defines the teacher as incompetent and the process as a waste of time. The clash of perspectives apparent in Alex's and the teacher's construction of their roles further alienates Alex, who comes into the system believing that there is no point in working hard, because of the unfair practice and discrimination of immigrants in the labour market. After two months or so, Alex dropped out of the English course but continued taking maths, where the teacher's action and perspective reflects his understanding and definition of the teacher's role, as is implicit in his statement above.

Alex, in addition, refers to language or, to be precise, his poor ability in Swedish as an obstacle to interacting meaningfully with the teachers and the students in and outside the class. This concern Alex raises is important and one which is often taken for granted in this context in Sweden. The language of instruction (Swedish in this case) is rarely problematised, but taken for granted. Many of the teachers I interviewed formally and informally in both Komvux and the folk high school stressed that immigrants generally performed poorly because of their limited language ability in Swedish, the language of instruction. Hence, according to them, what is required was more and better methods of teaching Swedish as a second language. A similar perception was apparent among the majority of adult educators in a recent seminar on diversity and adult education organised by my institution in cooperation with Komvux and a folk high school. The dominant perception among the participants was that if immigrants could speak Swedish perfectly, preferably without an accent, they would have little or no problems in making it in the system, and would also have no problems in the labour market.

The multicultural "other"

Alex views the multicultural social situation of the school, particularly the social segregation between the natives and non-native students, as primarily a language problem, and the insensitivity of the natives in this regard. Alex, in other words, perceives interacting with the natives as potentially risky, that he can easily be perceived as stupid, or an object of a good laugh or a clown for the natives because of how he expresses himself in Swedish.

> I: Alex, you usually joke in the class with Duniya, Mohamed, Mayte and Hector, but I have not seen you talk with Malin, Lasse and John ...
>
> We are comfortable with each other, when I speak in my own language. They don't think that when I speak, I speak bad Swedish or ridicule me because of that. That is why I am always with my friends, who I can speak with in my language and at the same level. That is also why you see that, in the cafeteria, Chileans sit together, Swedes sit together and so on.

Therefore, his choice to segregate himself (voluntary isolation) can be interpreted as a strategy to avoid a potentially humiliating or risky social interaction. His ethnic group consequently provides him with security, and a sense of belonging, and this minimises the anxieties he associates with inter-ethnic interaction or interaction with the natives.

Interpretation, the immigrant and Komvux

It is apparent in the above description that Alex perceives the school as a place to improve his Swedish language and not a place to attain a particular academic or professional competency. Nor does he believe that his education will increase his chances in the labour market. That is, he does not see the school as a second-chance education, but a place to meet others, and to learn Swedish. In spite of the fact that the programme is not primarily a language programme, it provides him with the possibility, however limited, (see the pattern of interaction, chapter 5) to speak Swedish with other immigrants. In this context it is essential to point out that the school has a language programme. But the language programme is mainly geared to providing students with the qualification, or language competency, for admission to different courses and programmes, such as the basic education programme that he is enrolled in. That is, after the SFI programme, they are expected to participate in the educational activities of the school as any other native students.

Alex also raises a central and a hotly contested issue in multicultural societies, particularly in the field of education – the language of instruction. The language problem in multicultural classes is complex and has a number of dimensions. Language defines a collectivity, it is an identity marker. As a marker it both includes and excludes others. A good example of language as a group identity marker in multicultural societies is the controversial issue of

English versus French in Quebec, and English versus Spanish in California.

Hence, the language issue Alex raises is multidimensional, but I will focus here on language as a barrier to communication. It is important to stress that immigrating to a new country is a crisis in itself, it involves learning in many cases a different language and new ways of doing things, or "culture", and creating working social relationships for the immigrating other. All these aspects are explicit and implicit in Alex's comments vis-à-vis the school, and in the interaction with the native actors in the school. Language involves understanding the different shades and nuances in the language, humour, social codes etc., that are inherently part and parcel of language. In a new situation and language, these social skills are no longer obvious, leading to passiveness or, as in the case of Alex, to voluntarily distancing himself from the natives, and instead socialising with his own ethnic group.

Hence, Alex's choice to socially isolate himself in relation to the native students is a conscious strategy. In other words, his choice to socialise with his ethnic group allows him to be himself. Within his ethnic group, he is accepted as part of the group without any conditions. He believes that in order to be accepted by the dominant group or the natives, he has to speak perfect Swedish. Consequently, Alex identifies language as *the problem*, and an obstacle that makes it difficult for him to succeed in the school, but also, he perceives that it limites his ability to meaningfully interact with the native actors in and outside the classroom environment.

His situation in the school is further compounded, particularly in adult education, by the fact that the students in this type of institutions do not usually have the same level of education and experience. Consequently, the issue in this context from the perspective of the teachers and the schools is how do you teach "Swedish" as a second language, for example, to a Chinese, an Arab, etc., who is educated, semi-educated or illiterate, and in the case of Komvux and the folk high school, in the same class environment. Although this issue is important, the most important aspect vis-à-vis language in this study is the institutional response and the students' perception, particularly by the non-native students. Alex, like many non-native students, perceives the emphasis on language (as a criteria of placement but also evaluating ability) in adult education institutions as an unfair praxis to evaluate their knowledge and ability.

Alex's indifference is reflected in how he acts in the class. For example, he rarely contributes to the class discussion, he is gener-

ally disruptive and spends very little time on school work if he can help it. In other words, his actions in and outside the school (spending more time in his hobby rather than the school work) is consistent with his indifference towards the formal aspect of his school career. In addition his attitude towards his school life is closely related to his view of the teachers. He expects that a teacher should be able to "teach" in the traditional sense, assign a text book, preferably going from the first chapter to the last. A teacher who does not have structure or does not meet that expectation is defined as an incompetent teacher.

His conflict with the English teacher described above is, therefore, based on two contradictory understandings of the role definition of a teacher. A teacher who strongly believes in the idea of "self-directed learning" and a student whose view is that the job of the teacher is to "teach". In brief, the conflict between the two was a conflict over meanings and role definition, and both chose not to compromise. Alex eventually dropped out of the English class.

His attitude, experience and perspective towards the school and the "other" is, in the final analysis, based on his construction of his social reality as an immigrant in Sweden today. He strongly adheres to the notion that as an immigrant he has very little chance of making it in the Swedish society and believes this has nothing to do with knowledge or ability. Instead it is due to the attitude of the majority group, or culture. This is the frame of reference Alex brings in his interaction with actors and the institution and which he uses to define his reality and action in Komvux.

Laila

Laila is in her early thirties and a single mother of four children aged 2-15. Neither of her parents had more than six years of education. At 16 she began her working career and explains her decision not to pursue her education in the following manner.

> ... My mother worked for a long time in industry. When she stopped working, she enrolled in a 3-year programme in economic studies at a folk high school but never completed her studies. She could not afford it. A short while after that she opened a small shop, near the school. One day she fell and injured her back, so she could not work for some time. We could not afford to hire somebody to work and we had no choice. I had to work in the shop. At this period I was studying very hard in the shop, but I was constantly interrupted by the bell. The bell rings whenever somebody comes in and I had to

> interrupt my studies to serve the customer. When we sold the shop, I went back to school and it was very difficult for me to concentrate. I reacted to every sound ... and in a class with many teenagers, there was a lot of noise and I could not concentrate ... it was very difficult for me ... and a few months I dropped out of the school ...

Her first job was at EMX, which she got one week after dropping out of the school. From 1979, until she enrolled in Komvux, Laila worked in different types of jobs, both in the private and public sectors.

> I: What did you do or worked with after your primary education?
>
> I left school and started to work. In fact it only took me a week to get a job. My first job was at EMX, I was young, sixteen years old, very insecure and scared, so it did not work well, and I stopped working there after a couple of months. When I left this job, I joined a programme at the job centre, a programme where you are introduced to and test different professions. Then I worked as cleaner, work experience project in AMU's school restaurant. My last job was in an old age home. I became unemployed and the job centre offered me a course. The aim of the course is to strengthen students' self-confidence. The school is called Pedix and is located outside the town. But because I had no basic education, I could not continue with the technical courses after the introduction course. I needed a basic education competency. Therefore, I decided to enrol in Komvux to get both my basic education and secondary education competency.

Like John, she enrolled in Komvux, as a consequence of attending an orientation course organised by the job centre. Although Laila knew about the existence of Komvux prior to enrolling in the school, she knew nothing about it. "I know where it was, really, I knew nothing about the school."

What is Komvux for Laila?

What does the school mean for Laila? As is evident in her statements, Laila enrolled in Komvux in order to attain primary and secondary education competency to pursue a university degree in engineering.

> I: What are your intentions in enrolling in Komvux?

> I have got 30 or more years of working life, I have worked in these dirty jobs, I do not want to spend the rest of my life cleaning. I have decided, to get an engineering degree at university level. That is my goal, but you never know, I don't know if I can manage ...

Laila wants to turn around her life, get a profession, and in the process improve her social and economic status. Komvux is therefore a place to achieve her goal. In other words, Komvux for Laila is a second-chance education. It is important, however, to point out that Laila has no illusion that it will be easy to go back to school in the light of her social situation as a single mother of four children. She is conscious that she has to make a lot of sacrifices. For example, she is aware that she will have to prioritise her time between her studies and her children. Hence, going back to school means little or no social life, as is evident in her remarks below.

> I: You have been in the school for a couple of months now, what is your perception of Komvux?
>
> You know I am a single mother with four children, it is tough. It is not that easy, for example, to do all the homework you are given in time, but so far it is going OK. I do not have free time for myself. Discipline is the most difficult part of going back to school. As a single mother you have to balance the time you spend studying and time for the children. I am sometimes careless with homework because I have to spend some time everyday with my children.

She adds:

> ... The lessons in the school are mostly summaries and information, most of the work you have to do at home ...

So far, she points out that she has managed to accommodate the different and often contradictory demands and responsibilities as a student and a single mother. One can say going back to school for Laila means a constant act of balance between the needs of her family and the demands of the school. She is, however, pragmatic about it and is determined to achieve her goal.

> I might take a break from school, if it becomes too much for my family, but I will pursue my goals however long it takes me.

159

Laila and the school life in Komvux

In general, Laila's attitude and experience of the school is positive. She attributes this positive attitude to an inner motivation and personal interest, and not to satisfy "other people". This does not mean that she is not critical. For example, she perceives the teaching materials in her English class not to be adapted to adult students (the English Laila is referring to is not the class I observed). But as noted above she was also dissatisfied with the initial information she received about the school from the counsellor at the job centre and the school.

> I: What is your experiences of studying at Komvux?
>
> It is fun now. Maybe because one is more mature and has a personal interest. It is something I chose myself. No one tells me now that I have to go to school. When you are in primary school, it was friends and boys that were interesting, not the school. In my English class, the books are little bit childish. I have passed, for example, the age of writing love letters. In other subjects the teachers adapt the material to adult students. In maths, however, it does not matter if you are a child or an adult; it is the same.

Among all her teachers in Komvux, she identified the social science teacher as her favourite teacher and subject. According to her, this teacher uses simple language to explain difficult concepts and is easy to talk with. In other words, the teacher is not only approachable, but also human.

> ... A teacher has more knowledge than me in their subject. But this does not mean that they have more knowledge than me as a person. There is nothing that says a teacher has more knowledge than others in other areas – as an adult we are equals. In English we are changing teachers this term. Last term the teacher demanded a lot from us and we worked very hard, but not this term. I was talking this morning about it with one of my classmates. This term we did not work as hard, the teacher does not really check if we have done our work, so in the end we just did not do our homework. For example, our first teacher would give each student a word written on piece of a paper, and we were expected to explain the word, in what context the word is used, so that the class could understand the word. One had to know exactly what the word meant. So I studied very hard. I work well under pressure and a teacher should demand more from me. On the other hand, if the teacher is tough and demanding you study hard – I do not want to look stupid in front of the class.

Laila seems to expect the teachers not only to be structured in their teaching, but also able to have control. A teacher who gives students freedom to pace their studies and expects them to participate actively in planning their learning situation is perceived as incompetent. This view of the teacher's role is explicit and implicit in her statements. Laila's comment is a good example of the paradox of teaching adult students. The students seem to prefer, or even expect, the teachers to spoonfeed them with knowledge instead of having a teacher who expects them to search for knowledge and take responsibility.

> ... At the beginning of the term we can have inputs on the teacher's teaching plan, only a little bit, because we know very little about the subject, so in reality we do not have much to protest about ...

In addition, Laila perceives participation in planning, taking responsibility as a reversal of role identity and shared meaning. Moreover, as is explicit in her statements above, it is a signal for students not to work hard. The pressure to work hard is, therefore, a preventive strategy to counteract a potentially risky situation, i.e. to avoid embarrassment or to look stupid in front of her peers.

Laila and "others"

Although the social aspect of schooling is not important or is not a priority for Laila, she points out that it is complicated to socialise with "immigrants" because a) they tend to talk in their own languages, making it difficult to interact with them, and b) they have a different system of beliefs and values. Consequently one might inadvertently say or do something that immigrants might perceive as an insult, or hurt someone's feeling, without being even conscious of it.

> I: What is your experience of studying with students from different countries?
>
> I don't know, they talk a lot in their own language, and make it difficult for Swedes to socialise with them. One can't understand what they say. But, in addition, I as a Swede ... one is afraid. I have always been raised to respect people's religion and stuff. When it comes to immigrants you don't always know what religion they have, and may say or do something that might hurt someone without being conscious of it.

She consequently views the whole terrain of the "multicultural" situation as risky. As I emphasised in the social construction of the talk, the intergroup relation and interaction between the natives and the "other" is mediated by cultural abstractions about the "other", which is part and parcel of the symbolic world of the "other" and the social stock of knowledge available to both groups; "Swedes" and "immigrants".

Interpretation: Laila, the single mother and Komvux

Komvux for Laila is a second-chance education. That is, a place to attain a specific competency, and in her case to complete her primary and secondary education in order to enrol in the university, preferably in an engineering programme. From her perspective the school is, therefore, a second-chance institution. This perception of the school positively affects her experiences and attitude towards the school. In other words, one can say that her perspective is compatible with the "culture" of the school; a school culture that expects students to have clear goals and plans in order to design a programme that meets their individual needs, experiences, and ability. It is also explicit that she understands that in order to succeed in the system she has to have discipline and effectively plan her time in and outside the school, particularly in the light of her social situation as a single mother.

Although Laila is positive towards the school, she is, however, dissatisfied about certain aspects of the school activities. For example, she is critical about the English course which she views as not being adapted to the needs of adult students and the action or behaviour of the teacher. She is particularly critical of the manner in which the teachers define their role. The teachers, she notes, should be able to teach. That is, they should be able to motivate, control, and be approachable at the same time. She justifies her perspective by pointing out that the teachers are the experts in their particular subject area, and she or the students are not.

Her relation and attitude towards the "other" irrespective of their ethnicity is closely related to her definition of her situation in and outside the school. The school, as I pointed out earlier, for Laila is not a place to meet friends or socialise, and as is apparent in her narrative, she has very little time to socialise. But it is, however, important to point out that Laila views the "other" the non-native students, as culturally different. This definition of the "other" informs her action in relating to the "other". That is, she chooses to distance herself from the "other" for fear of "cultural" conflict.

Zlata

Zlata is a 27-year-old mother of two small children from Bosnia. She came to Sweden at the height of the civil war in Bosnia. Both of her parents have a secondary technical educational background. Her mother worked in medium-sized textile factory, and her father worked for some time in state-run vehicle maintenance workshop, and later he opened his own workshop. Zlata and her husband are both university educated engineers. Zlata is a construction engineer and her husband is an electrical engineer.

> I: Why did you decide to study at Komvux?
>
> You know every "immigrant" has to take the SFI. I was at home for about one year. My husband started the SFI programme and at night he taught me what he learned that day. So when I started Komvux the following year, I did not have to take the SFI programme. I started directly in the ordinary programme in Komvux.

Like all refugees and asylum seekers in Sweden, Zlata and her family spent some time in a refugee camp. A few months before they resettled in the municipality, she gave birth to her second child, and could not enrol in the SFI language programme. Nevertheless, this did not deter her from studying Swedish. After her maternity leave she was admitted into the ordinary programme in Komvux at the basic education programme. Although Zlata is a university educated engineer, in Komvux she was placed at the primary level, because her education was not valid in Sweden.

What is Komvux for Zlata?

Zlata is generally positive about Komvux as an idea or concept, but believes that she is overqualified for the school. Yet, according to Zlata, she has no choice but to enrol in Komvux in order to get the necessary qualification to enrol in an engineering programme at the university level. The lack of recognition of her past professional identity and education is frustrating. In this context, it is important to reiterate that Komvux is a second-chance education for adult students who for one reason or another did not make it in the ordinary system of education or want to upgrade their professional skills and knowledge.

> I think Komvux is good, the teachers try very hard to help the students. But Komvux provides courses that lead to a specific

> competency or certification for those who do not have any education. It is difficult to study with a group of people who have different goals, different levels of education, and many are really not motivated. I have an engineering degree, and to study certain subjects from the beginning because my grades or certificates were not accepted by VHS (National Agency for Higher Education) in Sweden is not easy. Many of us have an education. It is humiliating to sit here.

She adds:

> First I have to complete secondary education, and I am thinking about enrolling in a university. But I don't know how long it will take to fulfil all the criteria to qualify for admission. I talked to the student counsellor at the university, and she told me I must have all the subjects required for admission, and, in addition, English and Swedish at level B.

Her goal in Komvux is therefore to obtain the necessary qualification required by the Swedish university and the department of engineering. This view of herself, as an educated person, but whose qualifications and experience are not recognised by the system colours her experience of Komvux in general.

Zlata and the school life

Zlata, like all the students I interviewed in Komvux, expect the teachers to behave like traditional teachers. That is, teachers who are structured, can take charge, and are experts in their subject, instead of teachers who require students to take control of their learning situation. In other words, she believes that it is not the role or the job of the student to participate in planning their learning situation or the curriculum. This is the responsibility of the teacher.

> I: What is your experience of school?

> I think the teachers must force us or encourage us to work more. They should teach more instead of only giving us exercises. It is difficult for us, because we do not know what is important or what is not important. The teachers show respect to the students, but they do not tell or show the student whether they like the student or not. They never tell you how good or bad you are doing in the class. The only time you know that is during the student-teacher meeting, but not in the class.

On top of that, Zlata views the pace of education in Komvux as slow. In fact, she is the only student I interviewed formally or informally in Komvux who perceived the pace of education in the school to be slow.

> The pace is too slow. It depends maybe on the teacher, we waste a lot of time I think. I have talked to the English teacher, about whether I can join the intensive course in English next term. If I continue in this group, it will take three terms to finish the English programme at the primary level, but if I join the intensive English group it will only take two terms including this one to complete the English programme at this level.

Zlata successfully negotiated her promotion to another programme in English and in the process considerably shortened the time she would have otherwise spent in the programme. This sense of urgency on her part is not solely based on her self-perception and motivation but on her definition of her social reality. She considers that time is not on her side, because of her age.

> I: But in Komvux you can study at different levels, and in that way influence your study rate.
>
> I must study in Komvux for at least two years, for me it is a long time. I am 27 years old now. In two years I will be about 30 years old. By the time I finish my university education I will be 35 years old. It will be very difficult to get a job at that age, if you do not have work experience.

She is also increasingly thinking about a second option. Instead of pursuing her goal of a university education, she confided to me that she might opt for a one-year complementary technical programme in technical secondary school in the municipality. The qualification required for this programme according to her is a three-year technical secondary education. This is a decision which enables her to attain her past professional identity, within a short period of time, but at a lower level.

From the above description, it seems that apart from the lack of recognition of her past educational and professional identity, her age and time are the two factors which Zlata uses to define and construct her reality in the school, but also how she relates to Komvux. Time (programme length), the pace of education, and her age can be said to be the screen which she uses to construct her realities in the school.

The experiences and actions of Zlata described above are a good example of people constructing their reality, but also the multiplicity of realities, which is closely related to the individuals' perception of their subject position. But it also involves a process of negotiating identity(ies) in relation to and within the constraints of a social discourse, which, for example, define Zlata as the "other", based solely on her primary identity. But in constructing her reality in the school, she uses instead her age and educational background to define her realities in Komvux. These intertwining discourses play a central role in Zlata's definitions and interaction with the actors in the school, and her attitude towards the school.

Zlata and the "natives"

Zlata is struggling with a number of issues with her education in Komvux: attaining her past educational and professional identity, her age and her identity as an "immigrant". The first and the third issues are intimately interrelated. In her comment below, Zlata points out that it is not easy to socialise with the "others", meaning the native students, because of their negative attitude towards "immigrants".

> I: I rarely see you work with Malin, John, Lisa. Why?
>
> They sit there and we sit here. They don't talk to us and we do not talk to them. They have a bad opinion about us.
>
> I: What do you mean by "Us"?
>
> Immigrants.

This attitude, according to her, is due to the fact that there is a lot of ignorance about immigrants among the "natives". She notes: "It is probably a good idea to talk about the countries these different students come from." Her perception of the multicultural social situation of the school and the Swedish society is much more complex than most of the students I interviewed in the schools. For example, she points out that:

> I come from Bosnia, but even if I come from Bosnia, we come from different areas and cultures. I do not like the way Swedes make us all equal. For example, they look at Kosovo Albanians and they think we are the same. One has to look at us as individuals, and another thing, they have to accept our knowledge and experience.

166

She rejects to, or seems to be concerned about, in her statements above, the collective typing and the essentialisation of the "immigrants". But more importantly, she is concerned with the communal knowledge held by the natives about the immigrants, which is explicitly and implicitly used to construct immigrants as the "other" in relation to the norm. Her rejection is based on her perception of herself not as a member of a collective, a culture or ethnicity, but is based on her perception of past educational/professional identity. For example, the school is not a place for her, because of her educational background etc. In addition, her educational/professional identity is not recognised by the school because of her identity as an "immigrant". Consequently, despite her apparent rejection of the collective identity allotted to her by the "other" (native), she acknowledges the burden of the identity. In other words, she perceives the immigrant identity as an obstacle to reaching her goals and which impinges on her integrity and as is evident in her remarks below, it has consequences.

> As immigrants we always have to prove that we are somebody. The Swedes do not have to do that.
>
> I: What do you mean that you have to prove that you are somebody?
>
> If, for example, we want to achieve a goal, a similar goal to what a Swede wants to achieve, we must prove that we know a little more than the Swedish student to achieve the goal.

Hence, one can identify three important factors which seem to colour her perspective and experience in her encounter with Komvux or adult education in Sweden: a) her "immigrant" identity, which she defines as an obstacle to pursuing her present and future goals in the school b) her need or desire to maintain her professional identity prior to immigrating to Sweden c) her life situation, particularly her age. These are the three interwoven identity discourses that she uses to construct or define her reality in Komvux and which she brings into operation in relation to, and in making sense of her reality in the school.

Interpretation: Zlata, immigrant, and Komvux

The school for Zlata is not a second-chance institution but a place to regain her past professional career. Although she is frustrated by this lack of recognition of her past identity, she has accepted that her past educational career and experience are invalid in Sweden.

However, she is determined to achieve that goal. She is also aware that her age and time are the major obstacles to achieving her project. This definition of her social situation in relation to the school informs her action and how she experiences and relates to the school.

Zlata is not a passive student. She never misses a class, and interacts with the teacher, asking questions, and suggesting possible areas the teacher should cover. In addition, she always does her homework. Moreover, she is aware of the obstacles she faces, she is not indifferent or has not given up as in the case of Alex. Instead, she actively attempts to negotiate these obstacles in order to shorten her school career in Komvux. For example, in the English programme she managed to convince the teacher to promote her to a higher level, considerably reducing the time required for her to complete the programme. In addition, she is looking for alternative programmes that would allow her to attain her goal, but not necessarily at the same level. In other words, she is flexible. For example, she is increasingly thinking about opting for a two-year post-gymnasium engineering programme instead of a university degree in engineering.

A central factor in her definition of her reality in the school is her identity as an immigrant and she attributes her current situation and limitations to her identity as an immigrant. Therefore, her relation to the "other" – the native students – is based on her understanding of the perception of the "other", which is mediated to her through the social construction of the immigrant in Sweden.

This social construction reduces immigrants to a specific image, a stereotype that views all immigrants as incapable of functioning in a technologically advanced society as Sweden, or are illiterate and lack the social and cultural competency to function in a society like Sweden. Zlata defines this perception of the native as hostile, and this effects her relation to the native students in the class. Like Alex, she voluntarily chooses to distance herself from the native students in the school and the class. It is, however, important to point out that despite this negative construction of her immigrant identity, Zlata has not given up, nor does she view her situation and prospects as hopeless. In other words, she does not see herself as a victim if one looks at her action and behaviour in the school. She actively works the system and the constraints imposed by her identity as an immigrant to attain her goals. Zlata's action and attitude described above are a good example of people as active constructors of meaning and reality instead of passive victims of cultures, institutions or structures. In constructing her reality in the school, her

ethnic and immigrant identity are not the primary identities she uses in constructing her reality in Komvux. Instead, it is her past educational identity and age.

She is also critical of the teachers' actions or strategy and their relation to the students – particularly their lack of feedback to the students in the class, and their ambivalence towards the performance of the students. In other words, the teachers rarely motivated the students. In addition, she does not share a common interpretation of the teachers' role. The teacher, according to her, should be able to teach; hence, her experience of the school is that there is very little chalk talk.

Nina

Nina is a 42-year-old divorcee with no children. Her mother worked in a factory in the municipality and her father owned a petrol station until he retired. Both her parents had a six-year folk school educational background. Nina, like most of the students in the school, has a nine-year primary education background, and prior to enrolling in the folk high school had a long working career. She worked for the postal services for 20 years. Before that, she worked as a waitress in a restaurant, and in a retirement home for the elderly for nearly 5 years. She retired from the postal service because of a work related injury. At the recommendation of her friend she enrolled in the folk high school, as is evident in her comments below.

> I: Why did you decide to study in the folk high school?
>
> A number of my friends at work had studied in this folk high school, and recommended it to me. I applied and after a few weeks, I received a letter informing me when I could start.

Most of the students I interviewed in the folk high school, particularly the natives and some immigrants, enrolled in the folk high school because it was recommended to them by a friend who attended the school.

What is the school for Nina?

In her statement below, Nina's intention in enrolling in the school is not to pursue an academic or a new professional career, but to

improve her general education (allmänbildning), i.e. to learn for the sake of self-improvement.

> I am in the school because I think it is fun to study. I don't expect that it will lead to anything, a job. I am here to improve my general knowledge. Right now I am looking for a place to open a music cafe.
>
> I: Is your future plan to open a cafeteria?
>
> Yes.

Her future plan is to open a music cafe. However, the basic educational programme she is enrolled in is intended for students who want to pursue further education, or attain qualification for admission into a professional training. Although the programme has little relevance to her plans or intentions, it is significant to the extent that it fulfils her personal needs. Simply put, she does not associate her studies in the folk high with a career, but to improve her general knowledge.

Nina and the school life

Nina is generally positive towards the school despite the fact that she is not interested in attaining a particular competency. This definition of her participation in the school is explicit in her statement below.

> I: What are your experiences of studying in this folk high school?
>
> It is generally good, but there are certain things that they should change. In literature studies, fairy tales and that type of stuff, it doesn't give anything as an adult. The school is good, but I think they treat us like children.
>
> I: What do you mean by "they treat us like children."
>
> For example, I work in a support group. You talk with people, we are not supposed to talk about the things individual students tell us (secrecy about the things students tell us), but the teachers try to get involved in how we work. They think that we are incapable or don't know how to deal and work with the problems that arise
>
> I: Why do you think that the teachers do so?

> I think there many people in the school who have serious problems. One has the feeling that the teachers seem to be concerned only with this group of people.

Nevertheless, she perceives that some of the teachers treat adult students as children and this, according to Nina, is mainly due to their labelling or typification of the students in the school. It is important to stress that the folk high school prides itself in encouraging students to participate in decision-making and provides the students with the structures to influence their learning situation.

For example, every Thursday, all the classes have one hour set aside for planning and discussing class issues, and for information about ongoing and planned activities in the school from the class representatives in different committees and councils. To my surprise, however, in every session I attended, the students never discussed issues directly related to their learning situation or the formal aspect of their school life. They always discussed social issues such as class trips, coffee, and information about planned social activities, in the school etc. I have not in any of these sessions observed the teachers telling the students to discuss or not discuss an item. In fact the teacher tried as much as possible to stay in the background and not to dominate or direct the discussion one way or another.

The teachers' conceptualisation of student as irresponsible, lazy and workshy, according to Nina, informs the teachers' perspective and action, making it difficult for "normal" students like her to actively participate and influence their learning situation. This perception and construction of the teachers vis-à-vis the students is similarly implicit in the following statement.

> It depends on the teacher: The Psychology and English teachers are very good. It depends on what type of assignment you get, how they structure their lesson. Some are good.
>
> I: In what ways?
>
> They involve us in the planning a little bit. Some just tell that this is how it is.
>
> I: But the students can influence the teachers through different committees in the school such as the course council, or during class planning time every Thursday afternoon?
>
> They don't listen. I don't think so, I am sorry I wish it was better.

I: Why?

I think it is easier for them to structure it.

In addition, Nina also perceives that the content of teaching in some subjects is not adapted to the needs of adult students. Simply put, the teachers, from her perspective, have created a class environment (as a consequence of their typification of the students) that limits or stifles student involvement in taking responsibility for their learning situation. And she believes this is a consequence of the teachers' typification of the students in the school and its institutionalisation of the knowledge that the students are lazy and work avoiders. Nina's perspective of the teachers is based on her understanding of how a teacher should teach and behave. That is, a teacher should be able to treat the students as adults and understand the different needs of adult students, but more importantly that they can be responsible.

Nina and "other"

Nina defines herself as the "other" in relation to the students in the school and types herself as a "normal" student. Normal in relation to natives because many of them have social problems, and different from the non-natives because she perceives them as "culturally" different in relation to her and the natives.

I: What is your experience of studying with students from different backgrounds and countries?

There are different types of people here, I think. There was a time I felt that I did not fit in here, you know. There are a lot of people with problems in the school such as people with substance abuse, drugs and alcohol. One thought that it was only people with problems that came here, and not a place for ordinary people like me.

I: But have you tried to talk to the teacher about your situation and try to change it? You know there are ways to do that.

I don't know, but I don't see the reason why I should start changing things. Anyway I do what I want, and read what I think is interesting.

Consequently, she stresses above that "normal" students like her come second in the school. In this context, it is important to point out that Nina has a point. The school admission policy (see the

context) prioritises students that are socially and culturally disadvantaged in the municipality and the society in general. But as I pointed out earlier, the manner in which the school is organised offers student the opportunities and structure to influence their learning situation, and, in addition, the rhetoric of adult education in Sweden stresses that school activities and methods of teaching ought to depart from the students' experiences and needs – the democratisation of education.

But Nina believes that she cannot influence her learning situation, but she has not tried either. In the class planning sessions, I did not see Nina suggesting any changes in the way they act, their teaching style, or suggesting alternative literature. But at the same time, she claims that the teachers are not receptive to her needs or ideas: "They (meaning the teacher) do not listen anyway. I don't think they do. I wish they did so. It would have been better." This is a dilemma teachers face. Students do not necessarily want to participate in influencing their learning situation. Such actions involve questioning the actions of the teachers and institutions in unequal power relations and situations. This dilemma, however, is not unique to adult education or the folk high school, but is common in any formal and even informal learning situations.

In relating to immigrants or the other, Nina points outs that immigrants choose to isolate or segregate themselves. This, according to her, is due to: a) their poor Swedish language skills b) insecurity c) their culture, particularly their cultural view of women.

> They don't want to sit with us ... they want to sit in their groups. I don't know if they are afraid of us, or if they can't speak Swedish well or if they are insecure. They probably live a different social life than we do. You know, the way I understand it, it is the men who decide at home, the women don't.

She adds:

> I have a Thai sister-in-law. She has lived in Sweden for three years now, and can speak Swedish well. But she says it is up to her if she wants to learn Swedish or not. Language is important.

In the final analysis, she reduces the problem of interaction between the native and non-native students to a language problem and to a certain degree their culture. She assumes, however, that if the "other" is fluent in the language of the dominant group, it would facilitate their integration in the dominant community as in the case of her sister-in-law.

Interpretation: Nina and the folk high school

In the above description, it is clear that in participating in the programme Nina is not interested in attaining a particular competency, nor to embark on a new career. She views her participation in the school as a place to develop as a person.

In her relation to the students, Nina defines herself as the "other", the "normal" student. This definition of herself colours and informs her experience of and attitude towards the school, particularly her attitude towards the teachers, whom she resents. She perceives the teachers' behaviour and action to be related to the teachers' knowledge of the students as social outcasts. She believes that this view of the students in the school informs the teachers' frame of reference in relating to the students, and as a consequence the teachers in the school are not sensitive to the needs of "normal" students like her.

Nina, in addition, typifies herself as the "other", but there is a subtle difference in her "othering" of herself in relation to the students in the school and in interacting with non-native students. She reduces the problem of diversity to a language problem. According to her, the inability of the "other" (non-native students) to speak correct Swedish encourages them to isolate themselves. The problem of diversity according to her is therefore not primarily a problem of culture, but a language or communication issue. However, like all the native students, she subscribes to an essentialist notion of "cultural difference", i.e. culture as a determinant of behaviour, and static.

Anette

Anette is a 26-year-old single mother. Her parents divorced when she was six years old and she has no idea where her father is. Like most of the students in the school, she comes from a working class background. Her mother has six or seven years of education and works in a retirement home in the municipality.

> No, I don't know. I think she has a 6-7-year basic educational background. I think but I am not sure.

Prior to enrolling in the school, Anette had a 10-year educational background and, like John, she dropped out of the system because she was tired of school, and the birth of her daughter, according to her, was a welcome excuse not to continue with her education.

I: Why did you drop out of secondary education?

I gave birth to my daughter, so I had no choice, but had to take care of the baby. I was at home, apart from taking some art courses. I was not ready to go back to school. I attended sporadically the first year of the secondary school, but after some time I dropped out, because it was no longer interesting to study. There were so many other things that I wanted to do than to sit and read or study. So the birth of my baby was a welcome excuse.

Three years ago she enrolled in the school, but was forced to drop out again. During this period Anette lost her daughter to the social welfare service and could not therefore concentrate on her school life then. Until she enrolled in the folk high school in 1995, she basically stayed at home, apart from attending some art courses.

I: Why did you drop out of the school again?

High rate of absence. I had no chance to continue because of it. At the time I was depressed. I had no strength to care about anything. I felt very bad, the social service took my baby away from me. The only way for me to get her back was to change my lifestyle and start studying again.

What is the folk high school for Anette?

It is not difficult to determine what the school means for Anette, as is evident in the above short presentation and in her statement below. Anette faced a crisis; her daughter was taken away from her by the social welfare service, and she realised that in order to get her child back she had to change her life style, and this meant going back to school. Implicit in her statements above and below this was a condition from the social welfare service. In other words, in order to get her daughter back she had to change her life style, and that meant getting an education and in the process rehabilitating herself.

I: Why did you decide to study in the school again?

First I applied to the school for the sake of the social welfare service, in order to get my daughter back. Then I thought to hell with what the welfare service think, because I have changed, and now I want to study to become someone.

Her long-term goal is to be a personal assistant, and the only folk high school that has this type of programme is located in Karlskoga. According to Anette she cannot realise this project at this particular

moment, because it means uprooting her daughter from familiar surrounding, school and friends. She plans, however, to continue with her education in the school, after this programme.

> Hopefully I want to take the PK1 programme, if I qualify for it. My aim is to enrol in a school in Karlskoga. But my daughter is too small for me to move to Karlskoga. She has just changed school. So I will enrol in the PK1 programme, and the complementary social science programme. When she is a little older, I will transfer to the school in Karlskoga and continue my professional training there.

From the above description one can discern that the act of going back to school for Anette is to bring some order into her otherwise chaotic life situation. Going back to school meant a chance to straighten up her life, first and foremost and a second-chance education.

Anette and the school life in the folk high school

It is important to point out that Anette is still relatively young compared to the majority of classmates. She dropped out of secondary school quite recently compared to the majority of the students in the programme. Her experience of the school is mixed. She is satisfied with the formal aspect of the school (the classroom interaction) with the exception of her experiences in the history class, which she describes as boring. However, she is very dissatisfied with the social climate in the class.

> I: What is your experience of studying in the school?
>
> The school is both good and bad. In fact I don't know. The class situation is OK, but there are talk and stupidity that is going on, and nobody trusts anyone. It is difficult to explain. But otherwise I think it's fun to study here. History, however, is boring. We study the same subject every time, 18th century, kings and that stuff. This is the only boring thing with the class lessons.
>
> I: Can you describe more precisely what you mean? A concrete example, for example?
>
> Yes, for instance, the bullshit and the teacher. The teacher started to get involved and divided us. When, for example, I didn't get to sit where I sat before, because some students got irritated. They were irritated about small things, ridiculous things. When the teachers got involved, it was much worse.

I: How did you perceive the teachers' involvement?

That it was my fault. I perceived it my fault. I heard it from the teachers, and from Nina, that I and some others in the class had caused the conflict.

I: How?

Because I sat in the wrong place and was short haired. I had cut my hair short and dyed it red, and Nina had the same hair style and colour. They were irritated because of that. I became angry when they went behind my back to the teachers. We are adults, we can say what we think without snitching to the teachers.

The poor social life in the class, according to her, was due to the action of some students in the class, which turned into conflict. She and a couple of her friends were accused of being the cause of the conflict and consequently the poor social climate in the class (For a detailed description of the conflict see chapter 5). Nina, however, perceives that the act of going and snitching to the teachers was not only inappropriate, but unjustified. From her perspective this instead was the cause of the conflict in the class, not her choice of friends as such.

In addition, Anette is not an active student in the class interaction. She rarely initiates interaction with the teachers or her fellow students. In fact, in all the time I spent in the class, I never saw Anette ask a teacher a question in the class, or contribute in class discussions. Anette is one of the invisible students, and one who wants to stay that way, because of her perception of classroom interaction. She defines class interaction as risky, and that there is a possibility that one can be humiliated, or made to look stupid in front of her peers.

I don't dare to say anything in the class, and I don't think the others dare to say anything in the class. We listen instead.

I: Why?

It is fear, that others might think that you are an idiot, something like that. That others might laugh at you. I have not thought about that, I only try to concentrate on not saying anything in class.

This perception of classroom interaction is not unique to Anette, but is common among many students interviewed in both the folk high school and Komvux. It is important to point out that the passiveness

of adult students cannot or should not be interpreted solely as a manifestation of indifference or lack of interest or motivation, but can be due to how they define the classroom situation.

> I have heard from my friends that Komvux is very bad, that they only study and study at the same high pace, I don't think I can make it in Komvux. I would rather take it slowly. It is therefore I chose to study here.

Moreover she perceives the pace of the educational activities in the school as satisfactory, neither low nor high, unlike Komvux, where she believes the pace is too high. This knowledge of Komvux is not mediated to her through her own experiences of the school, but from other sources, in this case the experience of her friend. Hence, her choice for not enrolling in Komvux is based on her understanding of her ability, and to a certain degree her understanding of what it means to study in the folk high school.

Anette and "other"

In her statements below, Anette views the multicultural nature and the diversity of the student composition of the school as positive, and one of the main reasons why she enrolled in the school in the first place.

> I would absolutely not study in a class where there are only Swedes, and only with people of my age group, or only foreigners. This is perfect, people of different ages. If nothing else, you get to learn how they think, their cultures and the experience of the older people.

But in her comment above, she views the "other", the immigrants, as different from the natives, and the difference is due to their "culture". However, although Anette is half-Swedish and half-Dutch herself, she does not perceive herself as the "other" in this context or in relating to the natives.

> We tried to have a class party last term at my place, and we invited all the students in the class, but the only person who was not Swedish who came was Ali. The rest decided to stay away. It is like they don't want to mix with us, or that they think it is difficult to socialise with us, or think that we don't want to socialise with them. The most stupid thing that I know that we people do, I don't give a damn what religion or things like that, that we don't try or dare to come close. I see a person like Claudia, I do not dare to approach her, I think that she

might think that I am imposing myself on her. Then I don't dare to approach and she doesn't either.

Although she perceives the "other" as different, Anette does not view this difference as a problem. She attributes her reluctance to interact with other students, whether they are immigrants or natives, simply to not wanting to be perceived as imposing herself on others. It is, however, important to stress that she, like the native students, operates with a cultural understanding of the "other". In other words, she subscribes to the notion that the "other" is different and that their attitudes and behaviour are determined by their "culture".

Interpretation: Anette, single mother, and the folk high school

For Anette, enrolment in the school is first and foremost a chance to turn around her life, and second, a second-chance education. In brief, to bring some sense of purpose and direction in her chaotic lifestyle, a lifestyle that once caused her to lose her young daughter. Anette's goal is to be a personal assistant. However, the school has no such programme, and in order to attain her goal she has to transfer to another school in another town. But this would involve removing her daughter from a relatively stable social environment. Hence, for the time being she has shelved this idea, and decided to continue with her studies in the school.

Her attitude and experience of the school are both positive and negative, depending on the context. She is satisfied with the formal aspect of her school life, with the exception of the history class, which she finds boring. But she is dissatisfied with the social aspect of her school life and attributes this to the behaviour of some students in the class, and the action of the teachers. Anette's passiveness in the class is grounded in the fear of being perceived as stupid by her peers. Consequently, her passiveness is a strategy to avoid the possibility of this occurring, and has little to do with her motivation, interest, or ability.

Anette views the multicultural nature and diversity of the school as a positive aspect of the school. But despite this positive attitude towards the "other", she apprehends the "other" as "culturally" different. It is important to emphasise that Anette does not perceive this cultural "otherness" as a problem in terms of interpersonal relations. She attributes the attitudes and action of the actors irrespective of their ethnicity to human idiosyncrasies, and has little to do with the "culture" or religious beliefs of the "other". Conse-

quently, her social isolation from the "other" is not based on her typification of the "other" as "culturally" different and a problem, but simply because she does not want to impose herself on anyone irrespective of their ethnicity or culture.

Per

Per is in his mid-30s and a single parent. His father was a machinist by profession and his mother a housewife. He completed his primary education and dropped out of school because he was tired of school life and, as he points out below, it was not difficult to find employment then.

> I was tired of school, and there was a lot of work then, and the money attracted me.

Per embarked on a working career that lasted for more than a decade and held a number of jobs, mainly as a chimney cleaner and a seaman. Until he enrolled in the school, he was employed by the State railway system.

> I worked as chimney cleaner for a number of years. Then I was attracted by the seaman's life, where I started as an ordinary seaman. After working in a ship for some time, I decided that the navy was not something for me, so I went back to being a chimney cleaner. After some time I became tired of being a chimney cleaner, and I went back to working in a ship. I worked in this ship for 5 years until I met a girl and decided I wanted to stay at home and I also wanted to do something else. I got a job with the State railways system, and I stayed there until I had an accident and was injured. I am still employed there, but I cannot go back because they are downsizing their work force.

Like Nina, he enrolled in the school because he was laid off due to work-related injuries.

What is the school for Per?

In the above brief introduction and in his statement below, Per enrolled in the school because he was laid off and he views his enrolment as a stepping stone to his re-integration into the labour market. Per is, however, aware that in order to do that or retrain

himself in a new profession he has to complete his secondary education.

> I: Why did you decide to start studying again?
>
> I want to get back into the labour market. I have a nine-year basic education, so I have to get some form of education. But just now I want to see how it feels to go back to school. As I am 36 years old, I would like to have an education that is both technical and theoretical. Because age is against me. It is a long way, if you want to complete secondary education. So it is frustrating. First you have to complete primary education and then it takes another three years to complete secondary education. By then I will be 40. Then I have to compete with hungry, university-trained 20-year-olds. I think I will enrol in Komvux, the pace is higher.

But at the same time he is aware of the obstacles in his way. These obstacles according to him are: a) his age, b) the organisation of educational activities in the school and the institutional rules and regulations. Hence, from his perspective the school is a second-chance institution; to attain the necessary competency for a new profession, preferably in a technical profession. But it is not that simple, his aim in enrolling in the school is to see how it feels to go back to school. Therefore, his participation in the school is not to attain his goals, but to adapt himself to being a student again.

This wait-and-see attitude in relation to the school is a consequence of his definition not only of his life situation, educational needs but also the system of adult education as it is currently organised, particularly its inflexibility vis-à-vis the time required for a student to complete a programme. In brief, he believes he cannot afford to invest the time to retrain himself in a new profession and have a fair chance in the labour market due to his age.

Per and the school life

Although Per has adopted a wait-and-see attitude towards the school, he was one of the most active students in the class. He initiated interaction with the teachers and other students and was rarely absent. But, as is evident below he feels that the pace of the educational activity(ies) in the school is slow and, in addition, believes that the teachers in the school have low expectations vis-à-vis students' ability. As a result, Per is considering enrolling in Komvux, where he believes the pace is much higher.

I: What is your experience of the school since you started to study?

It is slow. Really, one ought not to say that the subjects are unnecessary.

And he adds:

I was surprised that there were low demands put on the students. Teachers must set standards.

I: What do you mean that the teachers must set some standards?

They know more than me. They know what is important or not.

However, unlike Komvux (see context description) the folk high schools students are expected, and have the opportunity, to influence every aspect of their school life if they choose to. Per, instead, perceives this as the domain of the professional staff of the school, but also believes that his ability to influence the system is limited. This is a common perception among all adult students interviewed in both Komvux and the folk high school. They all believe that they have little ability to influence the action of the teachers, despite the fact that in the folk high school the structure or nature of the organisation allows students to influence the system at every level.

I: But in the school you can influence the teachers in the school?

I am not involved.

I: Why?

I don't know, probably it, probably convenience. One can influence to a certain extent. You are given certain alternative nothing more.

Per's indifference to affecting his learning situation should not be interpreted to mean that he rejects the underpinning values or culture of the school (which attempts to foster and encourage students to actively participate in influencing their learning environment and situation) but is based on his definition of his situation in the school, and to a certain degree his interpretation of his social reality. For example, Per believes that time is not on his side. But more importantly he believes that there is very little he can do vis-à-vis the struc tural problems apart from enrolling in Komvux.

Hence, like many students I interviewed in both contexts, he either has to adapt or become indifferent or start looking for other alternative solutions, such as Komvux. For example in the case of Per, he is neither passive nor indifferent but he plans to transfer to Komvux and this decision is based on his interpretation of his social situation, particularly his age in relation to the school. He views his age as an obstacle to retrain for a new profession. That is, he believes that the process will take several years and by the time he completes his primary, secondary and professional training he will be too old for the labour market. It is clearly apparent that Per like many of the students interviewed associates going back to school with work. In other words, his constructions of his reality is based on an intertwining concern/discourse about adult education, age and labour market. Per's attitude/action towards his studies in the folk high school, and intention to transfer to Komvux is a good example of individuals as active constructors of their reality, and not passive victims of social structures, communal meanings, or buying into the rhetorics of the importance of education and the labour market.

Per and the "other"

Per is aware of the segregation of the "other" in the school, but as is apparent below he attributes it to the negative attitudes towards immigrants by the natives.

> I: What is your experience of studying in a school with people from different backgrounds and countries?
>
> Immigrants socialise with each other, it is like that. I don't know why, but it is so, and this is not only in the school, it is the same everywhere. It is not easy for them. They speak Swedish well. Many Swedes think that they are a problem or difficult to socialise with.
>
> I: Why?
>
> I don't know. I think because many think that they have a different culture, Swedes don't try and they don't try to make contact with the Swedes.
>
> I: What do you think yourself?
>
> I don't know. But I think it is partly due to their culture, but also their language ability in Swedish.

In the above statement, Per locates the problem in the natives' cultural perception of the non-native students. He perceives this perception of the "other" by the native as the main reason for the marginalisation of immigrants not only in the school, but also in the society in general. Similarly, in the above statement, he alludes to the language problem as a hindrance to the social integration of the "other" in the school. The assumption is that if the "other" is fluent in the language and culture of the dominant group, it would facilitate their integration in the dominant community.

Interpretation: single, middle-aged, and the folk high school

Per did not enrol in the folk high school to achieve a particular competency, but to see how it felt to go back to school or be a student again. His participation in the school at this juncture is to adapt himself to school life, to be a student, and to see if he is capable of investing the time and energy to re-educating and retraining himself for a new profession.

Moreover, he perceives his age as an obstacle to pursuing a long-term educational programme, which is necessary due to his educational background. In other words, he associates his studies with work. But at the same time he seems to be sceptical of the value of education at his age. According to him, by the time he completes his primary, secondary and professional education, he will be too old for the labour market. Hence, the structural problems of the system – the manner in which the educational activities or programmes are organised – are perceived implicitly by Per as an obstacle. Consequently, he is thinking of enrolling in Komvux, which he believes is much more flexible in that regard. It is thus apparent that Per constructs his reality in the school based on an interwoven social discourse of age, education and the labour market, but it also involves an understanding of his educational background. These aspects colour his relation and actions in the school.

Despite his wait-and-see attitude in relating to the school, Per is an active student in the class. But, at the same time, he subscribes to the notion that the teachers' job is to teach and control the students. Although he can influence his educational situation, he chooses not to do so, because of his perception that he cannot affect the institutional rules and regulation that count, or the time frames, and the pace of the educational activities in the school. Like many of the students in both Komvux and the folk high school, Per seems to locate the social isolation of the "other" in their command of Swedish and their "culture". In other words, he locates the problem

in the cultural abstractions of the "other" held by the dominant "culture".

Claudia

Claudia is a single mother of four in her late 30s. She is a naturalised Swede, but originally came from Chile. Like the majority of the students in the school, she comes from a working class background. Her father had a seven-year education and worked as a lorry driver, while her mother was illiterate and a housewife. After Claudia completed her primary school, her mother died and she dropped out the school to take care of young sisters, and brothers. She came to Sweden in the late 1970s as a refugee, and re-settled in the municipality in the early 80s. From 1982 to 1989 she worked in different types of jobs, but due to the heavy nature of her work, she became sick for a couple of years and as a consequence was laid off.

> I studied a little, about 3 months , before I started to work in 1982 as a cleaner in the municipality. In my last place of work, my work involved lifting heavy things, and I became sick. I worked in Domus' bakery, cleaned there. Because of the heavy work, I became sick, and I was on a sick leave for about 2-3 years. I became tired of sitting at home, I felt very bored, and applied to study in this school.

Unlike many immigrants today, it is important to stress that Claudia had a minimum of 3 months of Swedish language training when she joined the labour market. It is, however, necessary to put this fact in the context of the labour market situation in Sweden then. As is apparent in the statements of Per, Laila and Claudia later on, it was not difficult to get work in the mid-80s. There was a shortage of labour, and employers were not overly concerned with the language proficiency of immigrants, at least in certain types of jobs.

What is the schol life for Claudia?

In the following statement it is clear that Claudia did not enrol in the school to attain a specific academic or professional competency, but rather to improve her Swedish language ability to socialise with others.

> At first I tried to study part-time, because I was expecting my daughter. After the maternity leave, in 1993, I enrolled in the

> school to learn Swedish. I know I cannot study like those students who want to study for a professional career. I only want to improve my Swedish, and that is enough for me. I don't want to study and I don't like to be in the school, because in my youth I lost interest in school. I don't think about it anymore. I think of working.

In addition, Claudia does not associate her education in the school with work. This definition of her reality in the school colours not only her perception of the school work, but also her interaction with the actors in the school. In fact, Claudia points out that she would leave the school today if she go a job.

Claudia: the school life in Komvux

In the first two years, Claudia points out, she enjoyed going to school. But this changed when she began in the basic education programme. According to her, the primary reason for this change of attitude was the nature of the class composition (in the SFI programme there were only immigrant students while in the primary programme it is an integrated programme composed of both immigrants and native students). However, this is not primarily due to the nature of the composition of the class per se; instead, I believe it is partly due to her perspective and motive for enrolling in the school. As I pointed out earlier, the school, for Claudia, is a place to meet others. When it works (as in the SFI) her attitude towards the school and the actors is positive, and when it does not work, as in this programme, it is negative.

> I: Your have been studying in Komvux for some time now. What is your experience of studying in Komvux?
>
> Yes, the first two years were fun ... I think that immigrants like each other, it is calmer. When I started in the basic education programme, I felt like an outsider. It was very difficult to be part of the group.
>
> I: Whose group?
>
> Swedes. Then I began to get to know them, and I do not care any more. I smile and say hello. One sees in their faces when they want you to greet them.
>
> I: What do you think makes it difficult to become part of their group?

What do you think?

I: What do you think yourself?

You know what many Swedes think about immigrants. They do not like immigrants. It is not the same any more. I have lived here now for 16 years. It has changed a lot.

In addition, the perspective she brings in her relation to the school and the "other" is based on her perception of the social stock of knowledge available to her vis-à-vis her subjective position as an immigrant in Sweden, in brief, her identity as an immigrant. Claudia, like the majority of non-native students, perceives the immigrant identity or being the "other" as a handicap in competing with the natives for the limited job opportunities in the labour market today.

There is no point in studying, there is no future. There are many people who are losing their jobs. Swedes come first, it is impossible for immigrants to work when there are many Swedes out of work.

In addition, Claudia is not interested in the academic aspect of the her school life, and this in turn affects, or reinforces, her negative attitude towards the school. In the interview, she had very little to say about the formal aspect of her school life, in spite of my attempts to focus her attention on this dimension in the interview. She repeatedly told me that she was not interested in studying:

I: I have noticed that you rarely participate in class interaction.

I don't want or like to be in the school, because I stopped my school career when I was young. I want to work. Once or twice, I was given homework by the teachers, and I told the teachers, I do not want any homework. I want to work. I have no desire to study. Sometimes the teacher ask me a question, and nobody can answer, even if I know the answer, I do not. I am not interested.

I: Why?

I know a little bit about politics (social science), religion and so on, but when you are disillusioned you do not care.

I: Why are you so disillusioned and negative towards the school?

> I believe it is due to the people and the social climate. I see how much the attitude towards immigrants has changed. Before, one could get work, there was work, now there is nothing for immigrants.

In addition, in response to the question about her future plans after the course, she similarly noted that as an immigrant, it was pointless to find work in the current labour market because of negative communal knowledge and attitudes towards immigrants in Sweden today, but also, as is evident in her statement below, because of her age, and educational background.

> I: In a few days time, you will complete this programme. What are your plans, are you planning to continue or will you look for work?
>
> On Friday it is over. Then I have to think about what I have to do. In fact I started thinking about it in the last six months. It is not easy. I know I will go to the job centre, but I will find nothing there. I do not have a chance, Swedes come first. I am an immigrant. Swedes will never accept non-whites (svartskallar). Many have no work. What do you think? Do you think we know nothing. No, you know it is because we are immigrants. I know many from my country, but they have nothing. I am 33. Why do I go to school? There is no point. It demands a lot of time, and I am not young.

Her negative experience of the school, and social situation (unemployed) is therefore closely related to how she constructs her identity as an immigrant, single, middle-aged, and with a poor educational background, it is a combination that is not attractive in the labour market today. But as is apparent in her statement above, she seems to blame her participation in the school on the "others" (natives). In other words, she seems to say that if it were not for the negative attitude of the "others" (the natives), she would not be in school, but would be working instead.

Claudia and the natives

In the above description, it is apparent that Claudia's perspective on, and experience of, her school life is characterised by a lack of interest and motivation vis-à-vis the formal aspect of her school career. She prioritises instead the social aspect of her school life. Implicit in her statements in general is her understanding of the social situation of the group she defines as "immigrants" and the relation between the two collectivities in Sweden. The "Us" and

"Them" attitude permeates not only her perspective but also her experience of the school and her perception of the native students in her class.

> I: In the class you usually interact with Ali and Amineh, but I have not seen you interact with the other students. Why don't you interact with the other students in the class?
>
> I do not know, but I noticed the first time I came here to attend Swedish for immigrants (SFI). In this course we came from different nationalities, we spoke different languages, but we had fun and we liked each other. But not in the basic education programme. It is boring.
>
> I: Why?
>
> I do not know. Perhaps it is because the climate is harder now than before – they don't like us immigrants.

She also points out that:

> There are 3-4 persons who always work together, and most are alone. No one says to us, come and work with us.
>
> I: What do you mean by us?
>
> Me, Ali and Amineh, immigrants.

Claudia also views the native students as hostile, and their hostility, according to her, is manifested in their action – what she perceives as a conscious effort by the "others" to isolate immigrant students in the class. The "others" as group are defined as the problem and prejudiced, while immigrants, as a group, are not a problem, or are implicitly constructed as the victim. This view of the "other" in and outside the school seems to colour her views and therefore her experience of the school. But it is also used to justify her action and passiveness in the formal and informal aspects of her school life.

Interpretation: Claudia, single mother, middle-aged, immigrant and Komvux

What does the school mean for Claudia? Claudia is not interested in the academic aspect of the school, nor in embarking on a new professional career by enrolling in the school. She enrolled in the school for the simple reason that she was unemployed and had no chance in the current labour market, partly because of the current nature of

the labour market, but also because of her identity as an "immigrant". Enrolling in the school was therefore an opportunity to break the monotony of her day-to-day life and social isolation as a result of being unemployed. Consequently, it is not surprising that Claudia prioritises the social aspect, or informal, aspect of school life rather than the formal dimension of the school.

Hence, I believe her indifference towards her school life in the final analysis is based on her interpretation of her social reality not only as an immigrant, but also of her age, and lack of marketable skills. As result she believes no education can affect her situation. In other words, she constructs the formal aspect of education as irrelevant and meaningless to her life situation in the light of her social reality.

Claudia types tl.e native student as prejudiced and immigrants as the victims. In the process, she essentialises both groups, and the "other" is viewed as essentially prejudiced. This self-identification – being a member of a collective, "immigrant" – is an objective reality; it has social implications. I am not claiming that Claudia's perception of the "other" is right or wrong, nor do I claim that her voluntary segregation in relation to the "other" is negative or positive, but her attitude and experience of the school is based on her typification of the "other" and the collective defined as "immigrants", which, on close scrutiny, is an incipient abstraction and understanding of the "other".

Summary and discussion

The majority of the adult students in both Komvux and the folk high school investigated are adult students with different educational background and experiences, irrespective of their ethnical, social and cultural identity. In the portraits described above, it seems that adult student identities and social situations play a central role in how these students construct their reality in the school. For instance, nearly all the non-native students attribute their social isolation or clannishness to the attitude and the prejudices of the native actors, whereas the native actors, on the other hand, attribute their clannishness to cultural differences and the Swedish language skills of the immigrant students. But more importantly, as is evident in chapters 5, 6, and 7, the action, attitudes etc. of the "other" is culturalised, ignoring in the process their diversity in terms of gender, class, and individual peculiarities. This perception or construction, in turn, informs the frame of reference of the

native actors in interpreting the actions or the attitudes of the immigrant students.

In addition, both native and non-native students in their mid-30s perceive their age as an obstacle to retraining for a new profession or further education. That is, they do not associate their education with work. This contradicts the dominant discourse of adult education as a second-chance education. These students believe that when they complete their education or retraining they will be regarded as too old for the labour market. This is apparent in Per's, Claudia's, Zlata's portraits, but is also a common perception among students in this age bracket in both schools. This perception is in line with talk of age and the labour market. That is, there is a cut-off age, and if one passes it, one is no longer attractive. These students have internalised this silent discourse of age and work.

All the non-native students I interviewed in both Komvux and the folk high school suggest that the language of instruction disadvantages them. That is, it is an unfair praxis not only in evaluating their knowledge, but also in placing them in different programmes in the two school. All the teachers I interviewed also stressed that the failure of non-native students in the system is mainly due to their weakness in Swedish. In addition, the native actors in both schools attribute the social isolation of immigrants partly to the Swedish language skills of immigrants, and partly to the perceived prejudices of the natives.

Earlier, I pointed out that the dominating perception among adult educators, but also the social discourse in Sweden, is that the problem facing immigrants in Sweden is their poor language ability in Swedish. The solution is said to be more, and better, teaching in Swedish as a second language. Consequently, alternative views or solutions, such as bilingualism etc., are displaced by this compact and common definition of what the problem is and what the solution is. The argument commonly presented against, for example, bilingualism is that it retards proficiency in Swedish, and encourages social segregation.

The majority of non-native students perceive the lack of recognition of their past educational and professional competency as unfair, as disadvantaging them. In addition, they viewed the very idea of going back to school, and in most cases, at a lower level, not only as frustrating but also as humiliating. Moreover, adult students' experiences, motives and perceptions are diverse, as is evident in the student portraits, i.e. it is not determined primarily by the student's ethnicity, but is a function of how and what identity is perceived important in a particular context or situation. For

instance, Alex and Claudia enrolled in the school for two reasons: the social aspect of the school, and to improve their Swedish language skills. In addition, Claudia perceived the school as a place to wait for better conditions in the labour market. That is, it is explicit in their portraits that none of these students are interested in pursuing an academic career, or to attain a specific qualification in order to pursue particular professional training. However, both attribute their social situation (unemployment, and going back to school) to their identity as the "other" and the social discourse of the "other" as different and a problem or the intersubjective construction of the "other".

In contrast, Zlata and Laila have clear goals and this positively effects their attitudes towards their school life. Zlata wants to achieve her past professional identity, and Laila to upgrade her education, and eventually qualify for higher education. Hence, the attitude and demeanour Zlata brings in her relation to the school are closely linked to past educational background and professional identity. Both are also aware of the obstacles in their way. Social, in the case of Laila (a single mother with four children) and institutional rules and regulations, in the case of Zlata (the lack of recognition of her past educational background and the organisation of the educational activities in the school, which forces her to accept the time and pace set by the institution to complete a particular subject in a programme). Zlata, like Alex and Claudia, is also aware that she has to overcome a different type of social obstacle, i.e. not based on her character or ability or institutional rules and regulation referred to earlier, but her identity as "a social and cultural problem", or the "other".

It is important to stress that these typifications and meanings associated with a particular identity are social constructions individuals use to construct their realities and are mediated to them and others in a society through interaction, just like any other cultural myths or traditions are mediated to members of a collectivity. In brief, these constructions are part and parcel of the social stock of knowledge of relations (in a multicultural context and in relation in a specific society) between different collectivities, genders and classes in a society. It is also used to justify and legitimise institutional practices, such as the SFI programmes, and institutions such as the integration department, but also rules constructed to mediate the relationship between the immigrating "other" and the native collectivity in multicultural Sweden.

All the students, irrespective of their identity, had a common perception about how the teachers should act as teachers. The common

perspective of the teacher's role among these students is that the teacher should be structured, approachable, or human, but also able to explain difficult concepts in a simple language. With the exception of Zlata, nearly all the students I interviewed formally and informally in Komvux perceived the work load and the pace of the school work in Komvux as unreasonably high, while the majority of the students in the folk high school found both the work load and pace neither high or low, with the exception of Per. What is apparent, however, in the action and attitude of the student such as John, is to pretend, and act busy, a form of subterfurge, or to show open disdain for the rules, as is evident in the case Alex. In addition, working hard does not necessarily mean that students want to learn. For example, some do, like Laila, but she also stresses that working hard also is means to avoid looking stupid in front of her peers.

In the final analysis, it is evident the students' perception of their identities, as adults, single mothers, age, educational or social background, or as the cultural "other", or "immigrantness", plays a central role in their construction of their reality in the school. In addition, the majority of the actors closely relate education to work, with the exception of Nina, Claudia, and Alex. But it is important to stress that in constructing their reality in the two schools, it is apparent that the student share a number of characteristics other than the typifications addressed in chapters 6 and 7, and it also shows the weakness of these typifications.

In constructing their reality it is apparent above that the typification used in defining the "other" as different is not always the dominant or the only aspect of their identities that they use, for example, in making sense of their reality in the two schools. For instance, for Zlata, her educational background and age play a central role in defining her reality and guiding her actions in the school. For Claudia and Alex, it is their immigrant identity; for Per, his age, while Laila, on the other hand, does not perceive either her age or educational background as an issue in her educational career in Komvux. Instead, it is her social situation as a single mother.

Reflections

Until I read and analysed the interview data, I did not realise the power of Thomas's dictum that:

> If men define social reality as real, they are real in their consequence. (In Woods, 1983, p. 7)

That is, whatever the objective circumstances is, if people define a situation in a certain manner, it will be the context that informs their action. What surprised me most, and which I had difficulty relating to in my fieldwork, was how the students, irrespective of their ethnicity, defined their reality as adult students in adult education. The main factor, or the factor that was central in their definition of their situation, was their "social situation", and how they perceived that in relation to the school and their prospects in the labour market. The majority of the students, particularly in the folk high school saw their age as an obstacle to continuing their educational career.

Irrespective of their ethnicity, the majority of the students in their mid-30s or above, in both schools would prefer to work instead of going to school, shattering my illusion, or preconceived idea, that adult students enrol in adult education in order to learn and, in the process, improve their chances in the labour market. The students in their early 20s, in both contexts, saw their participation in the two schools or institutions as second-chance education – an instrument to improve on past educational credentials, and hopefully improve their social status or mobility.

All the immigrants I interacted with in both schools, saw their identity as immigrant as an obstacle, but like the native students the majority of the immigrant students in their thirties also saw their age as an obstacle for getting work in the Swedish labour market. They also viewed the lack of recognition of their past educational career, knowledge and profession as unfair, and as handicap to pursuing their careers in Sweden. In their constructions, they tended to paint themselves as victims of their circumstances as immigrants and, in the process interpret, their social situation as a consequence of the intolerance of the majority "culture".

Consequently, these students construct a communal knowledge, meanings and myths of a collective that shares or experiences a common fate that transcends the ethnic diversity of this collectivity in relation to the dominant group. In addition, the myth of common experience is sedimented by the fact that the majority of immigrants are located at the bottom of the labour market pyramid, enabling, for example, Claudia, Zlata or Alex, etc., to talk in terms of "Us" – the "immigrants" – or conflating the individual to the group experiences.

It was difficult for me to deal with this situation, particularly when some the students opened their souls to me, telling me how

miserable their life was as the result of their identity as immigrants, but more importantly I was frustrated by their acceptance of their situation and belief in the interpretation or definition of their reality. The "cultural" discourse the native students operated with was also problematic. I was both the interviewer and the "cultural other", and I found myself in a position of participating in a social discourse that attempted to force me into a categorisation that I was not comfortable with. I dealt with this feeling of hopelessness by assuming the role of the researcher, and in the interpretation to focus on the subaltern perspective. In other words, I felt I had to present the case of the "other" and to participate in the social dialogue that attempts to fix my identity, and in the process, my options and alternatives in my adopted country.

Chapter 8

Conclusions and Discussion

The focus of the study has been to describe and understand the labelling practices in operation, or the social construction of difference in the ethno-culturally diverse contexts of the two institutions and their possible impact on how the actors define and construct their realities and experiences.

By this, I hope to contribute to existing research in the area in following three ways: a) to introduce the debate, concepts etc., from the international discourse on multiculturalism, ethnicity etc., to the Swedish educational scene, and particularly adult education. b) to use concepts and perspectives from this discourses using cases from the Swedish adult education context as the empirical basis for interpretation, and thus produce some empirically based conclusions as a contribution to the knowledge about adult education in Sweden. c) Actualise some issues in the contemporary debate about the role of the researcher and the social conditions for doing research in an area where the researcher is considered to belong to the marginalised group.

The researcher as the "other"

I will start with some comments about the last point, on the role of the researcher. The idea of reflexivity, or the role the researcher, is increasingly becoming a concern and a focus in the ethnographic research tradition. Kvale (1997), Ehn and Klein (1994) all emphasise the need for reflexivity in qualitative studies. For instance, Hammersley and Atkinson (1995), writing about reflexivity note that:

> Reflexivity thus implies that the orientations of researchers will be shaped by their socio- historical locations, including the values and interests that these locations confer upon them. What this represents is a rejection of the idea that social research is or can be carried out in some autonomous realm that is insulated from the wider society, and from the particular biography of the researcher, in such a way that its finding can be unaffected by social processes and personal characteristics (p. 16).

In the methodological approach of the study (chapter 3) I pointed out that I was an active participant in the research process. In brief, I chose the context, the problem, the interview questions, and the theoretical perspective. But although I had control over all these aspects of the research process, the actors had control over what they chose to say or not to say, during the formal and informal conversations we had. In that sense, the data and the result of the study are intersubjectively constructed by all involved including myself. Consequently, my subjective position as an immigrant or the "other" has implications for the research process. It affected my relation and interactions with the actors in the field, and as such the data collected (see chapter 3).

Ethnically I am a Somali. I have only lived a very short period of my life in Somalia in my country of origin, and with my ethnic group. One can say that most of my life I have been an immigrant in different countries. Therefore, I do not have a strong commitment to my cultural identity as others would like me to have, including my ethnic group. Nor do these aspects or threads of my identity, plays an important role in my day-to-day life as the natives actor may want or choose to believe. In brief, I do not organise my life around my immigrant or ethnic/cultural identity or the colour of my skin, nor do I perceive that these threads of my identity(ies) determine my actions, attitudes and behaviour or ability(ies) or lack of them.

But despite this perception of myself, it is not the prevailing perception among the actors in the field. For instance, during the field work, the more I talked and observed the actors in the field, the more I realised that the actors, for different reasons, were all trying to place me in one category or the other. At times I was a Somali, or an immigrant or a student researcher, or all three. The dominant perception among the actors, however, was my "immigrantness" or my immigrant identity; an immigrant who in their eyes had made it in the system.

The actions of the actors, verbal and non-verbal are issues that have and continue to puzzle and confront me in my interactions with the "natives but also in my relation and interactions with my immigrant friends. The most striking aspect, however, was my realisation that I was the "other" for both groups. I was both an immigrant and a researcher, a symbol of a person that has made it in the system in the eyes of both immigrants and the "natives". During the interviews the immigrants students poured out their souls to me. Hoping probably that I would speak for them in my research, give them a voice, but also acknowledge their life situation as immigrant, and understand their failures. For instance, in talking

about their experiences, they tended to collectivise their experiences using the phrase like "you know as immigrants the "Swedes" do not like us". They position themselves in the role of the victim. In the field work, I had to negotiate all these perceptions of the actors of my identities, I could do little about them, but I was conscious about their possible impact on the data collected.

For the "native" I was both a researcher and the other, and in my formal and informal interactions with them, I was kept at an arm's length. In talking about immigrants they explicitly and implicitly pointed out that I made it in the system because my Swedish language ability was better than the average immigrant, despite my apparent limitation in the language and accent. I believe the majority of the "natives" in the field overlooked my language limitation in Swedish, because of my educational background – that is as a PhD student. I was not, in their eyes, the average "immigrant" .

All these aspects of my perception of who I am and the actors' perceptions of who I am permeate the data collected and my interpretations. In addition, my choice of theoretical perspective in this study is related to the research question and intentions, i.e. social constructionism, a theoretical perspective that critically examines and questions the common sense constructions that we use in making sense of our world and others.

Discussion

The common thread in the talk described in chapters 5, 6 and, to a certain degree, even 7 summarised above, is "difference". That is, the actors define each other as different using a variety of typifications. In addition, as is evident in chapter 7, the individual students in the two schools experience and construct their reality differentially, depending upon different aspects of their identities that they bring to bear in defining their school life or how they present their selves in relation to the school. The idea of difference in feminist discussion and debate is not different from the idea of difference in the debate about cultural diversity, pluralism and hybridity. Brah (1992), writing about diversity, difference, pluralism from a gender perspective, writes:

> Diversity, difference, pluralism, hybridity - these are some of the most debated and contested terms of our times. Questions of difference are at the heart of many discussions of feminism (p. 126).

Brah in addition writes:

> It is evident that the concept of difference is associated with different meanings in different discourses: But how are we to understand "difference". A detailed discussion of this topic is beyond the scope of this article but I would like to suggest four ways in which difference can be conceptualised and addressed: difference as experience, difference as social relations, difference as subjectivity, and difference as identity (ibid., p. 140).

In this discussion, I will similarly focus on the concept of "difference" a central conceptualisation in the actors constructions of themselves, and the "other". This is essential to shed some light on the students' definitions of the realities, their actions, experience etc., in the two schools. But it is essential to emphasise that the following conceptualisation of difference is based on my interpretation of the empirical data. My point of departure is the talk itself. Thus, from the talk of the actors, one can conceptualise "difference" in the following manner.

Difference as identity

In the theoretical perspective, I outlined different ways in which identity can be defined, and for the purpose of this study, I adopted the definition that identity is the end product of intertwining threads. For example , there is the thread of ethnicity, gender, age, sexuality etc. Consequently, from this perspective it is futile to talk about a fixed core vis-à-vis identity as in multiculturalism, but instead it is fruitful to perceive identity as fluid and multiple. This understanding of identity permeates the following discussion.

It is clear in chapters 5 and 6, that the central focus in the talk is the group identity(ies). In other words, the construction of boundaries, but also the scripting of boundaries between groups. These boundaries can be tightly or loosely scripted. For example, in multicultural social discourse, the construction of boundaries between the Norwegian and the Swedish ethnic identities or cultures is not as tightly scripted as the boundaries between an Iranian and a Swede, etc. Eisenstein (1996) points out:

> Borders define and differentiate an inside from the an outside. They are constituted through a construct of difference that is singular and exclusionary. American slavery defined racist borderlines between white and black. Civil-rights legislation rearranged the boundaries. ... The boundaries constructed through one's sex, gender, and sexuality cut apart and dissect

> the multiplicity of any one individual's identity. Any one identity embraces multiple borders: black women, Muslim girls, gay men (p. 30).

In chapter 6, it is explicit that the primary identity that the "native" actors construct "immigrants" as different and a problem is culture and from language. The native actors, for instance, perceive the social marginalisation of immigrant students in and outside the school or the society in general as a consequence of their culture. In addition (see chapters 5, and 6) the action of the non-native actors is culturalised, or is said to determine their action, attitudes and lifestyles. From the perspective of the natives actors, the primary difference between them and immigrants is their cultural identity and as is evident in the labelling practice, and meaning associated with these typifications. Saraga (1998) points out:

> People differ in many ways, and we are not seeking to deny those differences. Rather, we wish to emphasize it is only some differences that are seen as particularly significant, and to consider why those differences are given a special status in common senses, within much social science, and within political and policy debates. The differences that are seen as significant are not only differences in how people look, but in how they behave ... or how they live (as with ethnic majority/ minority cultures) (p. 197).

Although, the actors use a variety of labels to define the other as different such as immigrant, ethnicity, or language etc. Yet culture seems to be the most important category that the "natives" use to differentiate themselves from the "non-native" students, or in constructing the immigrants as the "other".

In the theoretical perspective, I stressed that culture, is a social construction. I also stressed that individuals in a collective can define their cultural identity as both objective and subjective. They can objectively define themselves as different in terms of the language they speak or religion they profess. However within each collective, individuals can participate differentially in their "culture" as a consequence of their subjective positions, and experiences. In this sense culture is not abstract, provides members of a collective with ready-made meanings (frames of reference) which are specific to a collective in specific time.

Consequently, a different cultural perspective can be viewed as "normal", "abnormal" or archaic, and the members or carriers of the "abnormal" culture can be perceived as undesirables, consciously or unconsciously typified as "untouchables". In the process they are

isolated and segregated from the "normal", for fear of corrupting or polluting the "pure" or the "normal" culture of the "native". This perception of the "other" as a problem is stressed by the actors as evident in the labelling practice. As a consequence interacting with the "other" is constructed as a terrain full of risks that one should avoid or manoeuver with extreme care to avoid "cultural conflicts" or misunderstandings, suggesting that interacting in monocultural social situations is unproblematic.

This understanding of the "other" as "culturally" different and a problem is sedimented knowledge about the "other", as is apparent in chapters 5 and 6. In other words, it has become the common sense knowledge of the "other", leading, for example, to a situation whereby the actors in a collectivity take this difference as natural. But, more importantly this conceptualisation eclipses serious discussions on how the "other" is "culturally" imagined. The danger is therefore, a debate and praxis focusing on simplified assumptions of the "culture" of the "other", such as the gender relationship of women in Muslim cultures, dress codes of Muslim girls or their non-participation in extra curricular activities in school etc. Unfortunately, the trend in the debate on multiculturalism in Sweden is such.

Although culture, as noted in this discussion, is the most important category used in othering the "other", it is essential to emphasise that the "culture" identified as "different" in this talk is the "culture" of non-European communities. Therefore, an important aspect of the cultural discourse the "native" actors operate with is an understanding of the "other" in terms of "race", to be precise in terms of "whiteness "and "blackness" or who is "white" and who is not. Consequently, one can argue that the crude (biological) racial discourse of the past has been replaced by a culturalist discourse of the "other" as different.

This is apparent if one takes into consideration that both schools are multiracial. But in the social construction of the "other" as different, "race" or colour is not used to define the diversity of the student body in the school by the "native" actors. The negation of the colour itself indicates to the "other" the negative connotation of being "non-white" in a "white" space. "Blackness" in other words is problematised but "whiteness" is not thus racism based on colour is made invisible through the use the concept of culture in this context. Rudolf Wicker (1997) similarly notes that the idea of culture as an autonomous whole (the classical concept of culture) is under serious scrutiny. There are two types of criticism of this view of the classical definition of culture. The first group perceives that the

classical definition of culture has replaced the older concepts of race, and argue in favour of the need to remove both race and culture as useful analytical categories. They stress that just like physiological characteristics or traits were inadequate to classify people into unchanging and non overlapping race, culture is similarly too diffuse and ambivalent to construct distinct cultural systems. In addition they also note that:

> While the classical definition of culture seemed to explain cultural borders quite naturally as stages of transition from one cultural system to another, ethnicity research actually studies the ethnic borders themselves and the mechanism used to preserve them. Probably the most important innovation from this approach concerned the fact that ethnic lines of separation was found to constitute and preserve themselves through process of ascription - to self and other (ibid., pp. 34-35).

Therefore, the apparent cultural discourse that is based on a classical definition of culture is not a unique discourse that is specific or an invention of the native actors in the two schools. It is but a popular discourse available to all in the Swedish society vis-à-vis the "other", which the actors have adopted as their own. In other words, one can say that the "native" actors have been furnished with ready-made meanings or frames of reference to make sense of the "other" in the multicultural social situation in Sweden. In this discourse, the "other" is typed not only as a social problem but also as a "cultural" problem and implicitly, a threat to a nation unified by a language, culture, history and destiny.

Imbedded in this cultural understanding of the "other" is hierarchical notion of culture or an understanding of culture in terms of primitive/modern, compatible/ incompatible culture or cultural distance from the "natives". This binary perspective of cultural understanding in the multicultural discourse in Sweden and many Western European countries is based on a simplistic understanding of culture, i.e. culture as static and as a prescription for attitudes and behaviour. This perception of culture leads to binary discourse of "Us" and "Them" that essentialises and naturalises the difference between the different communities on the basis of culture.

This ethnic and culturally essentialistic perspective in which the native actors operate and which is used to other the "other" in multicultural public discourse in Sweden is problematic. It tends, as I pointed out in this discussion, but also in the perspective of the study, to ignore the multiplicity of identity of the "other" in terms of sex, gender, class, etc., as is evident in the portraits. But it also

attempts to homogenise the experiences of the "other". Not all immigrants in Sweden experience racism, discrimination, or segregation in the same manner. For example, a Norwegian or an Englishman in Sweden do not experience discrimination and racism in the same manner as an Iranian or an African.

In addition, it also ignores the constant processes of redrawing the boundaries in the social relationships between the immigrants or minorities, and the majority culture. In other words, the relationships between social collectives are not static but fluid. Alliances are drawn and redrawn across groups and cultures in a multicultural social situation. In Sweden the trend is to abandon the typification "immigrant" for the ethnicisation of the "other". But I am sceptical about this social project since it is one-sided, from the natives to the non-natives, without including the "other" in the dialogue, and I do not think the change will lead to an improvement or change in the rhetoric of the "other". Yuval-Davis (1997) notes:

> Racist discourse is defined as involving the use of ethnic categorisation (which might be constructed around biological, cultural, religious, linguistic or territorially based boundaries) as signifiers of a fixed, deterministic genealogical difference of the "other". This "others" serves as a basis for legitimising exclusion and/or subordination and/or exploitation of the members of the collectively thus labelled (p. 193).

In the previous three chapters, but particularly in chapters 5 and 6, the actors operated with the perception of stability of identity, for instance, the idea that cultural identity decides peoples' actions and attitudes, but also the collectivisation of people constructed on the basis of this primary trait. Therefore, if one adopts the above definition, one can label the cultural discourse of the native actors as "cultural racism". But on the other hand, the actors as apparent in chapter 7, do not solely organise their life around their primary identities, but use other identities such as educational background, or class, experiences etc., to make sense of their reality in the two schools. In other words, they do not necessarily use the same threads of their identity(ies) as indicated in the talk to construct their experiences, or interpret their world or their educational career in the two schools.

This shows the weakness and simplification of typifications which are used by the actors to define the "other" as different from the norm and in the process defined as the "other" and therefore a problem. Moreover, these typifications are generally associated with perceived differences in terms of ability and experiences. Hence, a

group of people can be constructed as a problem, which in turn generally leads to the creation of programmes that are intended to cure this group of people from the perceived social problems. That is not to say, however, that there is a consensus on what the problem is and how to deal with it. But generally, there is a dominant construction of what the problem is and the solution in a particular time and context. For example, the marginalisation of immigrants in Sweden today is generally perceived as a language problem; and hence, the solution is said to be more Swedish language. In brief, there is some connection between the way we talk about a social phenomena, and its solution or how we deal with it.

Difference as experience

Labelling and in the process, the constructions of difference have consequences for how people relate to things, and how they perceive and experience the world. In the formal and informal interviews, it is plain that the actors collectivised their experiences in talking about their experiences of the schools, life situation or condition and interacting with the "other". For instance a non-native students pointed out to me: "You know they will never accept us svartskallar", suggesting that all native students are prejudiced, and that all non-native are victims of the natives prejudices. But also that all immigrants experience native prejudices, discriminations, and racism in a same way or manner. In the process, the "native" students and teachers are constructed and essentialised as prejudicial. But also the native students homogenise and lodge the actions and experience of the "other" in the "culture" of the non-native students.

But if one closely examines the statements of the actors, it is evident (see chapter 7) that the actors, particularly the students construct their reality and experience in nearly the same manner, irrespective of their ethnicity. Their experiences of the school is closely linked to what aspects of self they bring to bear in defining their reality in the school in relation to their definition of their intentions and expectations of enrolling in adult education in the first place. It is also evident that all the students, irrespective of their ethnicity, have mixed experiences of the two schools; the majority generally have positive experiences vis-à-vis different aspects of their school life.

Anette, for example, has positive experiences vis-à-vis the formal aspect of her school life, but not in the informal aspect of her school life. Zlata, on the other hand, is dissatisfied with both the formal

and informal aspects of her school life in Komvux. Laila in Komvux finds (in certain subjects) the teaching material is not adapted to adult students and, according to Nina, the teachers treat the students as irresponsible and lazy. They do not expect much from the students. This experience of the school and teachers in the folk high school is shared also by Per.

Per, in the folk high school, and Zlata, in Komvux experience the educational activities as slow. However, the majority of the students in Komvux unlike the folk high find the pace, and the work load in Komvux to be unreasonably high, and the perception among the students in both schools vis-à-vis the teachers is more or less negative. That is, irrespective of their ethnicity, the majority of the students in both schools demand more chalk talk, contrary to the teachers' definition of their role and the culture of the school, particularly in Komvux.

These differences and similarities across cultures and ethnicity, as is noted in chapter 7, and above, can be linked to the students' motives, intentions and expectations, but also to the identities the students bring in defining their reality(ies) in the two schools investigated. In other words, individuals may not use or choose the same images of selves in experiencing a phenomenon (Woods, 1983). For example, both Alex and John have similar experiences of Komvux, i.e. they both experience the work load, and high pace of their educational life as a problem. One can argue that they lack commitment to the institutional rules and regulations (culture of the school). Woods (1983) points out that commitments are closely related to identities.

In addition, Alex and Claudio in Komvux, and Claudia, in the folk high school, have more or less defined their school life in Komvux and the folk high school as a waste of time as a consequence of their perception of their immigrant identity and what it means socially. On the other hand, age for Per and Zlata (apart from Zlata's immigrant identity) is the image of selves that they use to define and interpret their experiences of their educational life in the folk high school and Komvux. Per is therefore thinking about transferring to Komvux, while Zlata is working the system to shorten her educational career in Komvux, although Zlata, like the majority of "immigrant" students interviewed in both Komvux and the folk high school perceives her identity as an "immigrant" as an obstacle, but in constructing her reality in Komvux it is her educational and professional experiences that she brings to bear in making sense of her experiences in Komvux.

Hence, it is apparent in the above short presentation that difference as experience is used here as a praxis of making sense of the world and is in the final analysis a struggle over meanings. Central in this struggle of meanings or differences of experience is in turn closely related to the subjective positions individuals occupy in a society/culture.

Difference as a subjective position

Typing, as I emphasised in the theoretical perspective of the study, involves allocating identities and, more importantly an appropriation of world view that is specific in socio-cultural contexts. Berger and Luckmann (1967) writes:

> To be given an identity involves being assigned a specific place in the world. As this identity is subjectively appropriated by the child ("I *am* John Smith"), so is the world to which this identity points. Subjective appropriation of identity and subjective appropriation of the social world are merely different aspects of the *same* process of internalization, mediated by the *same* significant others (p. 133).

But the intersubjectively constructed world does not necessarily mean that every individual interprets this culturally specific information or knowledge in the same manner. Both Figueroa (1991) and Blackledge and Hunt (1985) point out that symbols are essential in constructing meanings in the social life of a group and these can be verbal or non-verbal, abstract or concrete. In addition Blackledge and Hunt (1985) note that meanings are not private, but are instead socially obtained in a specific socio-cultural context that we use to make sense of our world. One set of interpretation systems is typification schemas we use to categorise people.

People's actions consequently involve taking account of each other's action, and this involves a process of interpretation and adaptation to situations. Simply put we occupy a social world that others and I reworked and that we are constantly reworking (Figueroa, 1991). A good example of reworking the externally appropriated world view or meaning is, for example, the discovery by Per that the "other" despite the communal knowledge is "normal" after all (see Per's portrait).

In chapter 5 (the social practice of labelling) and chapter 6, it is evident that the actors talk from a position of either the insider/outsider or "Us" and "Them". These positions are intersubjectively allocated or constructed and used to constitute, for example, the

"immigrant" identity. In the process the "immigrant", the "cultural" other, etc. is appropriated a social world, reality or meaning. This shared external construction is not only internalised but also externalised by the actors in their interactions. Moreover, it is, or can be used by the actors to collectivise their experiences, contest the boundaries thus constructed, but also mobilise groups around these identities and demand social and material rights, despite the heterogeneity of experiences within the groups constructed as different or the same.

All the non non-native students interviewed perceive that they are treated differently because they are immigrants and implicitly as one student pointed out that the natives will not accept them (immigrants) because they are not "white". Similarly, Zlata, in the portrait points out that in order to succeed in school and society she has to work twice as hard as the "native". Or as all the non natives students interviewed stressed they are socially marginalised in the school, or perceived to lack the socio-cultural competence, etc., that is necessary to function in a technological advanced society such as Sweden because of their cultural otherness from the norm etc.

One can, therefore, argue that the construction of the other as a different and a problem involves the creation of a person/group that is different from the "norm" – "the Swede". It involves the appropriation of not only a subjective identity, but also an appropriation of a subjective position based on the allocated identity, an immigrant or the cultural "other"; for instance, the association of "cultural" difference or colour with ability or certain types of social pathologies, certain attitudes, beliefs, life style etc., as is evident in the native actors' talk. This construction of the "other" as a deviant, or an aberration from the "norm" is based on a theoretical perspective, and on an essentialist view of "culture", which assumes that some "cultural" groups have or are equally committed to their "cultural" or religious identity. This appropriation of a subjective position as is evident in chapter 7 plays a central role in how the non natives define what the school means to them and their experiences of their school life in the two contexts.

That is, the students' definition of their school life or career as significant or insignificant depends on the different images of self that they bring to bear or interpret a specific social world. These images of self can be the "immigrant" identity, age, educational background, experience, professional or otherwise, etc., or a combination of these images, and they mean. In other words, these images are not simply plain descriptors, but are hierarchical organisers of social relations in a specific socio-cultural context.

The "natives" as the prejudiced "other"

Looking at the empirical result and analysis of the data, (particularly chapters 5 and 6,) one can easily present a strong case that the native actors are prejudiced or hold hostile and negative attitudes towards the "other and act on that basis. This assumes that the actors (the natives) are true to their prejudices in every context. The segregation of the "other" in the talk of the actors can be, for example, attributed to or viewed as the consequence of the cultural prejudice of the natives, a problem that can be resolved with a large dose of multicultural education to cure the native actors from this social pathology. It can also be viewed as the result of the socio-economic and material marginalisation of immigrants. Such a definition of the problem is in line with the antiracist perspective which argues for the need to examine the power distribution in society etc., which maintains and reproduces the social inequalities in multicultural societies. In other words, in the solutions to perceived problem, we can trace how we define a problem, or the discourse of the problem in a particular context and time.

But the above interpretation does not present the whole picture or reflect the complexity of social relations in a multicultural social situation. For example, although John (see the portraits) perceives the "other" as culturally different, he socialises and interacts with the "other" – two Somali students in the math class. Similarly, although Nina constructs immigrants in the same way as John, she does not perceive her sister-in-law, a Thai, as "different", or a problem. In other words, native actors are not consistent in their prejudice, it depends on the situation and the "context".

Despite the inconsistency, one cannot deny the fact that the natives operate with the notion of the "other" as culturally different and which is used to explain and legitimise the social marginalisation of the "other". This perception of the "other" is not unique to the students and the teachers in the two schools, but is a common discourse that is used to explain the marginalisation of the "other" in Sweden.

Modood (1997) points out that after the second world war and the holocaust, racism based on biological categorisation (in terms of superior inferior races) is no longer viable. Instead what has emerged is racism based on cultural differences or what is commonly known as a cultural racism. This, he argues, does not mean that biological racism goes hand in hand with cultural racism, or that marginalisation of the "other" can only arise in the context of racism, but he points out that:

> Having anything but a European physical appearance may be enough in contemporary European societies to make one a possible object of racist treatment (not that only European societies can be racist, see, for example, Dikötter 1990). But such phenotypical racism can also be the foundation of a more complex form of racism ... My argument is that racialised groups which have distinctive cultural identities, or a community life defined as "alien", will suffer an additional dimension of discrimination and prejudice (ibid., p. 164).

He further notes that racism normally links phenotypical differences with differences in a collectives attitude, and behaviour. This new form of racism, he stresses, is not biological as in classical racism, but is likely to be based on history, social structure, group norms, values, and culture. Therefore, he notes:

> Thus, European people can have good interpersonal relations with certain non-white people and yet have stereotypes about the groups those persons are from, believing that the groups in question have major adjustment problems ... Such collective racism can be overridden in the course of interracial friendships and shared lifestyles, where a non-white friend, for example, can demonstrate that he or she is the exception to the stereotype; yet on the other hand, it is also clear that despite such one-to-one relationships, stereotypes may continue to be held by the white friend (and, of course, not only by whites) to apply to the group as a whole (ibid., p. 165).

Prejudice and its conceptualisation has been the major issue in the education of culturally diverse schools. According to Ratansi (1992), the 80s saw a heated and often scathing debate between advocates of multicultural and anti-racist education in Britain. The point of contention between the multiculturalist and anti-racist movement centred on their understanding of "racism". The focus of multiculturalism is on how to promote tolerance and equity for minority groups in a society:

> Tolerance is conceptualised basically as a matter of attitudes, and is said to be constituted by prejudice. The educational prescription is the sympathetic teaching of "other" cultures in order to dispel the ignorance which is seen to be at the root of prejudice and intolerance (ibid., p. 25).

The socio-political objective of multiculturalism according to Ratansi, is to create a harmonious and democratic cultural pluralism. The problem with multiculturalism, according to the advocates of the antiracist perspective, is not ignorance nor misunder-

standing of the "culture" of the "other. It is instead, they claim the social structure of the society, and the capitalist system. Hence, the prescription, they argue, is not the sympathetic teaching of "cultures" of the "other", but requires a radical change of the social structure and social institutions in a society.

Both perspectives, however, are not based on a firm conceptual analysis. Culture (see the introduction and theoretical perspective of the study) and "race" in the multicultural and antiracist discourse are essentialised, leading to a conception of the "other" as culturally different, and the native or all "Whites" as prejudiced or racist and this is but a simplification of complex social reality in cultural diverse societies.

The focus on prejudice and stereotypes in the multicultural and antiracist accounts and praxis noted above tend to create a dichotomy of the prejudiced "other" – the teacher, or students, and the victim, the cultural or racial "other" are then, according to Ratansi subjected to pedagogies that are supposed to cure them of their pathologies. Ratansi adds:

> There is a mounting evidence, however, to suggest a more complex picture. For one thing, many people who might be labelled racially prejudiced on the basis of attitude surveys or expressive behaviour in particular contexts turn out to be more ambivalent and contradictory in their discourse and practice" (ibid., p. 25-26).

The anti-racist perspective, therefore, sediments the boundaries and exclusivity of "white"-"black" collectivity in multicultural contexts, ignoring the fact that this very categorisation is contested. Moreover, this in turn attempts to homogenise the experiences of "blacks" in relation to the "white". In the process "blackness" is problematised, and "whiteness" is taken for granted.

As I emphasised in the social construction of the "other" as different, the social meaning of the concepts used to other the "other, is not only contradictory; it can be construed to mean anything. That is, it lacks a specific meaning and content. The culture of the "other" can be construed in one context to be positive and in another context as a negative phenomenon. For example, the tight family structure among many "immigrant" communities is perceived as a positive social phenomenon, but it can also at the same time be construed to be oppressive, limiting the individual freedom of the family members, particularly of women.

Our consciousness, awareness and world-view are inter-subjectively formed and mediated to the members of the community or society through symbol or language. But as I pointed out in the theoretical perspective of the study, individuals are social beings actively constructing their reality. In other words, they are not passive victims of social structures and cultures. People have choices, but the choices are socially constructed for them in terms of the alternatives available to them. Therefore, they are able to participate differently in a society. This, in turn depends upon the position they occupy in a culture and in society. For example, a group or a community in a society, because of the position and hence, the power they possess can impose their definition of reality on the "other", and how the "other" is labelled and represented.

Despite the pressures of hegemonisation and colonialisation implicit in the culturalist discourse of the "other" as different, individuals resist and construct their individual realities and identities by, and through, the discourse that defines them as different, strange and abnormal. For example, in the social construction of the "other", the concept "immigrant" is used by the native to define and homogenise a very diverse group as different from the natives the Swedes.

Although the migrating "others" as a collective have internalised and accepted the idea of "immigrant" as a collective identity, they nevertheless reject the social meaning inherent in the popular discourse on immigrants in Sweden or the culturalist discourse typifying immigrants as different. The culturalist discourse of the natives is construed by the "other" as a manifestation of racism, an instrument for their marginalisation and construction of their social reality. Despite the lack of concrete or overt racist attitudes and acts by the native actors in both Komvux and the folk high school the non-native students suspect that the natives operate with an idea or perception of who is a genuine Swede and who is not. In other words, in terms of who is "white" and "black". Gilroy similarly notes that the lack of overt racism does not mean that it does not exist.

> The frequent absence of any overt reference to "race" or hierarchy is an important characteristic of the new type of racism with which we have to deal with ... We increasingly face racism which avoids being recognised as such because it ables to link "race" with nationhood, patriotism and nationalism, a racism which has taken a necessary distance from crude ideas of biological inferiority and superiority and now seeks to present an imaginary definition of nations as a unified cultural

> community. It constructs and defends an image of national culture - homogeneous and perpetually vulnerable to attacks from enemies within and without (1992, p. 539).

In the portraits, it is also evident that the non-native actors, irrespective of their ethnicity, construct or define their reality and relation to Komvux and the folk high school in a similar manner. The common denominator in their construction is the perception of what it means today to be an immigrant, or their immigrant identity. All the "non-native" students interviewed perceive this identity as an obstacle to making it in the Swedish society and understand it as the reason for their marginal social situation in Sweden. But despite this fact they seem to construct their reality in the school differentially. This is a good example of individuals as active constructors of meanings and reality(ies). Their construction and experiences of the school life in both contexts appear to depend on a combination of: their age, educational background, interest in and motives for enrolling in the school, and, for the non-native students their identity as the "other".

This can be partly explained by the fact that, irrespective of their ethnicity, the majority of the students in the two schools are socially typified as marginalised or disadvantaged groups in the society, particularly the students in the folk high school. But it may also be partly due to the fact that the majority of the students participating in adult education do not see their participation in the two schools as a start of a school career, but as going back to school. In addition they all adhere to an instrumental notion of education, i.e. they associate their education in the two schools with work. Hence, going back to school means evaluating the past and the future. In brief, they are, for different reasons, facing a crisis in their life history, and this affects the manner in which they define their reality in the school.

For the immigrants the crisis is the act of migrating itself, and maintaining some form of continuity between the past and the present. In the case of Zlata, for example, who strives to maintain her professional and educational identity, and status, in a social environment that she perceive is hostile to her and defines her as a social problem. More importantly, however, a social environment that does not recognise and value her past and her experience. She defines this lack of recognition as an obstacle and blames the "other", the natives, for her predicament, in the process constructing the "other" as prejudiced. This definition of her reality affects her experience and relation to Komvux.

But although Zlata, Claudia and Alex are typified in the talk as immigrant and in the discourse constructed as similar they do not construct their reality in the school in the same way. Alex views the school as a place to improve his language ability in Swedish, while Claudia perceives the school as a to break from the monotonous life style of being unemployed. She is not interested in the academic aspect of the school, but instead views the school as place to wait until the labour market situation improves. Alex has given up. He believes he cannot get any work, even if he completes his education because of his immigrant identity. He constructs his reality not only from the social discourse, but also the apparent lack of mentors or role models within his ethnic group or within the group defined as immigrants irrespective of their educational background.

In fact one can argue that Zlata and Laila share a common definition vis-à-vis their participation in Komvux, unlike, for example, Claudia or Alex. Zlata and Laila view the school as a second chance education. Zlata, for instance, views Komvux as a place to attain her past educational and professional identity, whereas for Laila the school is a place to improve her life chances and social status. John's relation to Komvux, like that of Alex, reflects his construction of his reality, which is based on his situation and identity as a member of the upper class. His financial future is secure, and, as he noted, he always has a place in his family's company.

Although, immigrants and the natives are typified as a collective, their experience and relation to the school and the society are not same or similar, despite the attempts to homogenise their experiences and relations in the multicultural discourse, in terms of social programmes or measures. Nor do they experience social phenomena, such as racism, in a similar manner, since this depends on the dominant groups perception of the immigrants in terms of their perceived distance and closeness (the various ethnic groups) to the dominant group or culture. It is, therefore, necessary to place the student's definition of their reality in relation to its context. In addition, the majority of these students have long working careers, which means that they have been absent from the educational scene for some time.

Consequently, they generally tend to perceive, for example, their age and educational background as an obstacle, and, moreover perceive that the educational organisation in adult education is out of step with this aspect of their social reality as is evident in the statements of Per and Zlata. This definition of their social reality impacts not only these students' reality, but also the manner in which they relate to the schools. For example, Per is thinking about

enrolling in Komvux, because he perceives that the educational pace is higher. Consequently, he believes it will considerably shorten his educational career in the adult education system, and in the process improve his future employment prospects. Similarly, Zlata is thinking of shortening her educational career in Komvux, by enrolling in a gymnasium engineering programme. Hence, abandoning her ambition of enrolling in an engineering programme at the university level, which would otherwise take a long time to attain.

In addition, if one looks at the empirical data of the study, there is no difference in the manner in which the actors (students), irrespective of their ethnicity, define their role as students, and, in the process, the role of the teacher. Nearly all the student I interviewed in Komvux and the folk high school preferred "structured" teachers – that is teachers who teach not supervisors as all the teachers in both Komvux and the folk high school constructed their roles. In addition all the students in both Komvux and the folk high school irrespective of their ethnicity preferred teachers who were tough but fair.

Language as a problem

Apart from "culture", all the actors, in both Komvux and the folk high school identified the Swedish language as a problem. The language of instruction, however, cannot be discussed in this context, simply in technical terms, or in terms of what is the best language or combination of languages to teach multicultural or multilingual students. Language in a multicultural context tends to be conflated with ideas such as common identity, culture, nation, patriotism and power in a society, etc. Therefore, in the multicultural context, language is not only complex, but also a sensitive issue. Hence, I will limit myself to language issues or concerns raised by the actors in this study.

The academic debate in the area generally focused on the merit of bilingual and home language teaching in multilingual or multicultural classes or schools. There is substantial research on the pros and cons of home language and bilingual education in multicultural classes, its merits of acquisition of second language, and academic continuity of non-English speaking "immigrants" in the United States and the United Kingdom. The political and, to some extent the academic, debate in this area revolves around the politics of identity, national language, and the preservation of national minority languages and culture or the maintenance of cultural/linguistic

pluralism in a multicultural society. For example, the maintenance or Finnish and Sami languages.

The actors in the two school investigated identified language, or to be precise the poor ability of immigrants in Swedish, as a problem. The teachers I interviewed, for example, attributed the poor performance of immigrant students in the two schools to their poor language skills in Swedish, but also to a certain extent their passivity in the classroom. The native students, on the other hand, consider the poor Swedish language ability of immigrants as an obstacle to interacting with them, and hence, their social isolation in and outside the school. In other words, the native students fear that the "other" can easily misunderstand them leading to unnecessary conflict.

Immigrant students, for example, in the case of Alex, believe that they have to learn the Swedish language in order to effectively participate in Swedish society. In my formal and informal interviews none of the non-native students questioned their need to learn Swedish. The emphasis on Swedish, consequently, has implications for the individual immigrants such as Alex, Zlata and her husband. Despite their educational background they are placed in the basic education programme in both schools studied. Charles Westin, SOU 1997:158, p. 115) writes:

> At another level, the issue is the foreign degrees and certificates and their evaluation for the purpose of validating them for use in Sweden. For all adult immigrants it is paramount that they have a good education/training in Swedish based on their different prerequisites and conditions. Because adult education deals with adults, it has an important role to play, and there is a lot to be done when it comes to pedagogy (my translation).

But if the issue is the Swedish language, why does the system place university educated immigrants in primary education programmes and with students that are either illiterate or have dropped out of the primary education irrespective of their ethnicity. Elsie Söderlindh Franzén, according to Charles Westin, pointed out that:

> Adult education in the late 80s did not take up this challenge. In most cases text books developed for use in the Swedish compulsory school are used. Many teachers saw it as their task to impart abstract knowledge (e.g. grammar) without relating the educational task to the issue of how motivated adult student are to learn. For many adults who immigrated to Sweden from non-European cultures, it can feel degrading to be forced to sit in the school bench again (p. 116).

This is clearly an indictment of a praxis of placement and integration of the "other" in the adult education system. But more importantly, it is an indictment, I believe, of the quality of teaching Swedish as a second language, particularly at the SFI level (see chapter 6). The answer partly lies, as Westin rightly points out above, in the fact that during my field work in the two schools, I saw very little pedagogical discussion within this area (cultural diversity) taking place between the teachers and the school personnel in general. Similarly a 1992 evaluation of the teacher training programme noted that:

> More research and development work is needed on languages, bilingualism, language development and learning, adequate teaching arrangements and methods for both teaching home languages and Swedish as a second language (UHÄ-Rapport 1992, p. 42).

It is important, however, to point out that many teachers in Komvux and the folk high school are dedicated teachers, but as I implied above they seem to find it easier to do as little as possible as long as they show "results" or fill the teaching hours.

From the perspective of the non-native students or immigrant, the humiliation is not going back to school per se, as Söderlindh Franzén claims, but the lack of recognition of their past educational and professional careers, and worse, to be placed in a class with people they regard as educationally and socially not their equals or of low status. Zlata, for example, (see chapter 7) is positive to the idea of Komvux as institution, but believes that she does not belong in the school.

The teachers in both schools are aware of this problem, but they explain the presence of educated immigrant students by noting that immigrant students tend to lie about their educational background. This is because their performance in the diagnostic test is incompatible with their claim. This situation is further complicated by the fact that many immigrants lack the necessary documentation to prove their professional or educational background. Söderlindh Franzén similarly noted the attitude of the Swedish actors, particularly the teachers and the workers at the job centre who refer the immigrants to adult education institutions.

> An expression that comes up here and there in the interviews with the Swedish actors is "primaryness". If a person is defined thus it mean that an individual is illiterate or nearly illiterate ... When it comes to the Swedish actors' way of talking about immigrant there is some type of reductionism hidden in their

> judgement that immigrants "don't know enough". It is well known that they have poor educational background. That is, it is well known what different schools in different countries stand for. For example, when it says five year schooling in Turkey, this usually means half of that (1990, p. 112). (My translation)

But the problem that arises in this context is the testing of "immigrants" (testing to determine their level of education) and the ability of these students to express their knowledge with the limited Swedish they know. It would be difficult, I believe, for anyone to communicate abstract knowledge after SFI (Swedish for immigrants) and this is apparent in the teachers' statements in both Komvux and the folk high school (see chapter 6, language as a problem).

I believe that this emphasis on the official language (Swedish) by the teachers in the two schools, and by the native student is constructed from the multicultural discourse in Sweden, a discourse which attributes the marginalisation of the "other" to their ability in Swedish. Hence, the political and expert knowledge or discourse in this context calls for more language. Language in this discourse is portrayed as the magic wand which can solve the problem of the marginalisation of the "other". The rationale goes like this: if all immigrants can learn to speak Swedish perfectly, preferably without an ethnic accent, then their employability would be high and their marginalisation would be considerably less. Moodley (1995) notes that the monolingual language policy in the United State is based on a similar perception:

> This view attributes students' academic difficulties to a mismatch between home and school language. According to this line of reasoning, more English is the answer to the problem (p. 807).

The emphasis on monolingualism above and the rationale offered in its defence is strikingly similar to the teachers' construction of the "other" in the two schools, particularly with regard to their performance in the two schools. This conception of the official language, consequently, closes the door for experimentation, and creative solutions, e.g. bilingual education. In addition, it eclipses the assimilationist agenda of language, but also other issues such as the motivation of the adult students, their social situation, lack of recognition of the past history, or educational background, and it also diverts attention from critically examining institutional practices, etc.

Educational and pedagogic implications

The recognition or the non-recognition of cultures of minorities and other marginalised groups in the educational arena in cultural diverse societies is one of the most debated issues in culturally diverse societies, for example, the controversy of the inclusion of ethnic and women studies in the curriculum of higher education in the United States, or the multicultural education movements in Great Britain, Canada and the United States.

Multicultural education (see chapter one) in it simplest or basic conception presents a strong case for the affirmation and celebration of cultural differences within the institutionalised structure of the school. According to the critics of multicultural education, its focus on culture leads to an absurd reality and discourse, to borrow a post-modern term, a binary discourse of "Us" and "Them", "immigrant" versus Swedes", etc.

The "Us" and" "Them", the critics stress, is but a construction of identity based on historical myths of a collective or romanticsation and exotisation of motherland culture advocated by many communities in diaspora, but also by the dominant group or culture. Cultural reconstruction of identity, according to Tryona and Hatcher (1987, p. 288), was, for example, the point of contention in the curricular reform introduced by the conservative government of Mr. Major.

What is then constructed in the social construction of the talk is the view of the "other" as culturally different, different from the normal, or the Swedes in our case. The knowledge thus constructed has a tendency to be contradictory and reductionist as it focuses on both the values attributed to certain cultural groups and the assumed pathologies that afflict them as a consequence of their culture. Rantansi, in his analysis of the situation in Britain, pointed out that:

> Discussions around the educational achievements of British Afro Caribbean and Asia girls are also significant in what they reveal about the contradictions and reductionisms of both public and academic debate ... Take first, one of the major contradictions. The tightly knit Asian culture and its cultural agent the tightly knit Asian family are regarded ... as a key influence in producing high educational achievement. But at the same time culture and the family system is held responsible for a widespread pathologies supposedly afflicting Asian girls and thus also their education: the malaise of being caught between two "cultures" an identity crisis, a form of individual splitting

> between two essentialised cultural forms, Asian and British/ Western (1992, p. 18-19).

But it is important to point out that, unlike the students, the teachers do not operate with the categories: immigrants, culture and nationality only. For example, diversity within the Swedish ethnic and immigrants groups is attributed to the social class of these students. Class therefore, like the other category types described here (culture, immigrants, Swedes) is a social constructs and is part and parcel of the teachers understanding and typing of students as is evident below. But in the discourse of cultural diversity and difference, class is not the primary identity for othering the "other"

What is interesting is that all the teachers interviewed acknowledged or did not question the presence of university educated immigrants in their schools. Although the teachers seemed to recognise the different educational background of the students, the differences or experiences of this group of students seemed not to be valued or recognised by the institutions and the teachers.

The cultural discourse, as I pointed out in the introduction, has resulted in an educational praxis or strategy commonly known as multicultural education, developed in the mid 60s and late 70s, and anti-racist educational models. It is imperative for me to emphasise that I cannot in this brief presentation exhaust the nature and the pros and cons of these models, but highlight certain aspect of these models by discussing them in relation to the empirical result of this study.

The aim of multicultural education and pedagogy is to organise every aspect of the educational system in such a way as to allow minority students to attain educational success and social mobility. In the final analysis the model is intended to promote tolerance and equity for minority groups in a society. Hence, the issue of marginalisation and social justice are fundamental to multicultural education. Social structural problems however, according to Lynch et al. (1992), should not be confused with cultural diversity.

> When we talk about structural pluralism, we are describing the extent to which the pluralism of different value positions can be accommodated within the social, economic, and political make-up of any society. Too much accommodation and society can disintegrate, too little, it cannot legitimate itself and violent eruptions or even revolutions occurs. That is, at the same time, the fulcrum of creative social change and the dilemma for social policy makers. How much of what kind, to what extent can the cultural interest of minorities be expressed in structural

> terms. Should each have its own police force, or army, schools or legal systems (pp. 8-9).

But as I pointed out in the introduction, the model, assumes that social ills associated with the cultural "other" are primarily cultural. As pointed out earlier, I see no reason why individuals cannot operate across cultures. We constantly do that in our day-to-day life, we participate in different sub-cultures, without damage to ourselves, or corrupting the distinctive nature of the sub-cultures that we all differentially participate in.

On the surface, looking at the empirical data and analysis of this study, one can make a strong case for a multicultural education for the two schools studied. The lack of interaction between the actors in the two schools and the widespread negative understanding of the culture of the "other" can be attributed to two main factors: the notion of culture as a determinant of attitude and behaviour and the native actors perception of the culture(s) of the "other" or to be precise the hierarchic notion of culture the native students operate with. The non-native students perceive the natives as hostile and are suspicious that they harbour racist attitudes.

The emphasis on culture in multicultural education in the 80s became the object of criticism by the anti-racist movements and educators, particularly in United Kingdom. The perspective locates the problem of diversity and social problems associated with diversity to the socio-political structure of these societies, which they argue maintains and reproduces social inequalities in these societies. Hence, in order to deal with inequalities in the multicultural society they require not only an interrogation of the social structures but also a rehaul and transformation of the society. They argue according to Figueroa (1991):

> Marxist thinkers such as Sivananda have attacked approaches such as those in the first set as deficient (multicultural education – my parenthesis) in their theoretical analysis since they often focus on attitudes and concepts, and fail to see, according to Sivananda, that the act precedes the word, and that in a capitalist system the economic factor is dominant and determines social relations ... It is not just individuals' attitudes, awareness or behaviour that need changing, nor just specific details of the existing educational system that need piecemeal tinkering with: the whole system needs to be overthrown (p. 51).

The point of contention between the two perspectives is prejudice, particularly the construction of the "native" – the "white" society or group as essentially prejudiced as a group in relation to the "other".

In the above discussion I have relied on literature in the area from other countries, particularly Great Britain, and wherever possible, the discussion in Sweden. But it is important to point out that apart from Eriksson's (1997), Anderson's (1999), and Söderlindh Franzén's (1990) studies, there is very little research in this area in adult education. There is however constant political and social debate about the "other", but this debate tends to gain momentum as a consequence of specific events, for example, during deportation of refugees, or crimes committed by immigrants, or unemployment among immigrants etc. The discourse as I pointed out several times in this study discursively constructs the "other" as problem, and locates it in the culture, and implicitly in the non-whiteness, of the "other".

The project of this study as I pointed out in the formulation of the research problem, is not or does not attempt to come up with a model or solution to the problems that confront culturally diverse societies, but to show the complexity of such societies. But more importantly I wanted to argue against the simplistic notion of the "other" as different or strange. The idea of the "other" as different is problematised, and the arguments against such notions sets the stage for a change in how the "other" is rhetorically constructed and defined. Gergen (1995) similarly writes:

> Further as we have slowly learned, particularly from feminist activists - there is no area of daily life that is not political in implication - from cartoons that our children watch to our purchase of shampoo and shirts.

He consequently calls for reconstituting the rhetoric of the "other", not because as he points out of the need for better or more politically correct words or labelling of the "other" in our midst, but instead he stresses:

> From the standpoint of relational politics, it is essential to develop alternative rhetorics. This is not because we need prettier, sharper, or more sophisticated words in which to wrap the case. I am not speaking here of a "better spin." Rather, rhetoric is important because it is itself a speech act, a constituent feature of relationship. Because it is a form of action, rhetorics serve to form, sustain and possibly change patterns of relationship.

This change, he stresses, should move from a rhetoric of difference; "You" and "Me" or "Us" versus "Them", to a rhetoric of unity or incorporation. He notes:

> My special concern here is forms of practice informed by or congenial with the relational turn in constructionist theory. How can we move from argumentation, agitation and litigation to subtle and unceasing inclusionary activity?
>
> What forms of practice may be generated that move away from isolation and insulation and towards cross-fertilization of identities, intermingling of practices, inter-interpolation of selves and ever broadening forms of co-ordinated actions.

Yuval Davis, a postmodernist feminist writer, on the other hand advocates what she calls transversal politics. This process according to her, is grounded on dialogue that accommodates different positioning of women or people, without giving or granting any positions a prior access to truth:

> In transversal politics, perceived unity and homogeneity are replaced by dialogues that give recognition to the specific positioning of those who participate in them, as well as the "unfinished knowledge" that each such situated positioning can offer (1997, p. 204).

The central idea in transversal politics is the process called "rooting" and "shifting", which simply means that participants in a dialogue brings their "rooting" in her identity or collectivity, "but tries at the same time to shift in order to put herself in a situation of exchange with women who have different groupings or identity" (ibid., p. 204).

Modood in his article *Difference, cultural racism and anti-racism* in Britain calls for a politics that does not privilege any particular colour identity. He stresses that:

> A new public philosophy of racial equality and pluralism must aspire to bring into harmony the pluralism and hybridity that exist on the ground, not to pit them against themselves by insisting that some modes of collectivity trumps all other. That was the error of the anti-racism of the 1980s (1997, p. 175).

This does not by any account exhaust possibilities and models under discussion in this area, but these models or ideas that have in the final analysis a common point of departure, i.e. is social constructionism, particularly the notion that knowledge, identity, culture etc., are socially or inter subjectively constructed. Therefore, in order to positively impact social relations, we have to change how the "other" is discursively constructed as different, and the communal understanding of the "other".

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223

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224

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